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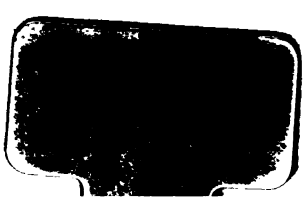

SORDELLO.

SORDELLO.

BY ROBERT BROWNING.

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EDWARD MOXON, DOVER STREET.
MDCCCXL.

45.

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SORDELLO.

BOOK THE FIRST.

Who will, may hear Sordello's story told:
His story? Who believes me shall behold
The man, pursue his fortunes to the end
Like me; for as the friendless people's friend
Spied from his hill-top once, despite the din
And dust of multitudes, Pentapolin
Named o' the Naked Arm, I single out
Sordello, compassed murkily about
With ravage of six long sad hundred years:
Only believe me. Ye believe?

Appears
Verona . . . Never, I should warn you first,
Of my own choice had this, if not the worst

Yet not the best expedient, served to tell
A story I could body forth so well
By making speak, myself kept out of view,
The very man as he was wont to do,
And leaving you to say the rest for him :
Since, though I might be proud to see the dim
Abysmal Past divide its hateful surge,
Letting of all men this one man emerge
Because it pleased me, yet, that moment past,
I should delight in watching first to last
His progress as you watch it, not a whit
More in the secret than yourselves who sit
Fresh-chapleted to listen : but it seems
Your setters-forth of unexampled themes,
Makers of quite new men, producing them
Had best chalk broadly on each vesture's hem
The wearer's quality, or take his stand
Motley on back and pointing-pole in hand
Beside them ; so for once I face ye, friends,
Summoned together from the world's four ends,
Dropped down from Heaven or cast up from Hell,
To hear the story I propose to tell.
Confess now, poets know the dragnet's trick,
Catching the dead if Fate denies the quick

And shaming her; 'tis not for Fate to choose
Silence or song because she can refuse
Real eyes to glisten more, real hearts to ache
Less oft, real brows turn smoother for our sake:
I have experienced something of her spite;
But there's a realm wherein she has no right
And I have many lovers: say but few
Friends Fate accords me? Here they are; now view
The host I muster! Many a lighted face
Foul with no vestige of the grave's disgrace;
What else should tempt them back to taste our air
Except to see how their successors fare?
My audience! and they sit, each ghostly man
Striving to look as living as he can,
Brother by breathing brother; thou art set,
Clear-witted critic, by . . . but I'll not fret
A wondrous soul of them, nor move Death's spleen
Who loves not to unlock them. Friends! I mean
The living in good earnest—ye elect
Chiefly for love—suppose not I reject
Judicious praise, who contrary shall peep
Some fit occasion forth, for fear ye sleep,
To glean your bland approvals. Then, appear,
Verona! stay—thou, spirit, come not near

Now—nor this time desert thy cloudy place
To scare me, thus employed, with that pure face!
I need not fear this audience, I make free
With them, but then this is no place for thee!
The thunder-phrase of the Athenian, grown
Up out of memories of Marathon,
Would echo like his own sword's griding screech
Braying a Persian shield,—the silver speech
Of Sidney's self, the starry paladin,
Turn intense as a trumpet sounding in
The knights to tilt—wert thou to hear! What hear
Have I to play my puppets, bear my part
Before these worthies?
Lo, the Past is hurled
In twain: upthrust, out-staggering on the world,
Subsiding into shape, a darkness rears
Its outline, kindles at the core, appears
Verona. 'Tis six hundred years and more
Since an event. The Second Friedrich wore
The purple, and the Third Honorius filled
The holy chair. That autumn eve was stilled:
A last remains of sunset dimly burned
O'er the far forests like a torch-flame turned
By the wind back upon its bearer's hand
In one long flare of crimson; as a brand

The woods beneath lay black. A single eye
From all Verona cared for the soft sky:
But, gathering in its ancient market-place,
Talked group with restless group; and not a face
But wrath made livid, for among them were
Death's staunch purveyors, such as have in care
To feast him. Fear had long since taken root
In every breast, and now these crushed its fruit,
The ripe hate, like a wine: to note the way
It worked while each grew drunk! men grave and grey
Stood, with shut eyelids, rocking to and fro,
Letting the silent luxury trickle slow
About the hollows where a heart should be;
But the young gulped with a delirious glee
Some foretaste of their first debauch in blood
At the fierce news: for, be it understood,
Envoys apprised Verona that her prince
Count Richard of Saint Boniface, joined since
A year with Azzo, Este's Lord, to thrust
Taurello Salinguerra, prime in trust
With Ecelin Romano, from his seat
Ferrara,—over zealous in the feat
And stumbling on a peril unaware,
Was captive, "trammelled in his proper snare,"

They phrase it, "taken by his own intrigue:"
Immediate succour, from the Lombard League
Of fifteen cities that affect the Pope,
For Azzo therefore and his fellow—hope
Of the Guelf cause, a glory overcast!
Men's faces, late agape, are now aghast:
Prone is the purple pavice; Este makes
Mirth for the Devil when he undertakes
To play the Ecelin; as if it cost
Merely your pushing-by to gain a post
Like his! The patron tells ye, once for all,
There be sound reasons that preferment fall
On our beloved . . . .
Duke o' the Rood, why not?
Shouted an Estian, grudge ye such a lot?
The hill-cat boasts some cunning of her own,
Some stealthy trick to better beasts unknown
That quick with prey enough her hunger blunts
And feeds her fat while gaunt the lion hunts.
Taurello, quoth an envoy, as in wane
Dwelt at Ferrara. Like an osprey fain
To fly but forced the earth his couch to make
Far inland till his friend the tempest wake,
Waits he the Kaiser's coming; and as yet
That fast friend sleeps, and he too sleeps; but let

Only the billow freshen, and he snuffs
The aroused hurricane ere it enroughs
The sea it means to cross because of him:
Sinketh the breeze? His hope-sick eye grows dim;
Creep closer on the creature! Every day
Strengthens the Pontiff; Ecelin, they say,
Dozes at Oliero, with dry lips
Telling upon his perished finger-tips
How many ancestors are to depose
Ere he be Satan's Viceroy when the doze
Deposits him in hell; so Guelfs rebuilt
Their houses; not a drop of blood was spilt
When Cino Bocchimpane chanced to meet
Buccio Virtù; God's wafer, and the street
Is narrow! Tutti Santi, think, a-swarm
With Ghibellins, and yet he took no harm.
This could not last. Off Salinguerra went
To Padua, Podestà, with pure intent,
Said he, my presence, judged the single bar
To permanent tranquillity, may jar
No longer—so! his back is fairly turned?
The pair of goodly palaces are burned,
The gardens ravaged, and your Guelf is drunk
A week with joy; the next, his laughter sunk

In sobs of blood, for he found, some strange way,
Old Salinguerra back again; I say
Old Salinguerra in the town once more
Uprooting, overturning, flame before
Blood fetlock-high beneath him; Azzo fled;
Who scaped the carnage followed; then the dead
Were pushed aside from Salinguerra's throne,
He ruled once more Ferrara, all alone,
Till Azzo, stunned awhile, revived, would pounce
Coupled with Boniface, like lynx and ounce,
On the gorged bird. The burghers ground their teeth
To see troop after troop encamp beneath
I' the standing corn thick o'er the scanty patch
It took so many patient months to snatch
Out of the marsh; while just within their walls
Men fed on men. Astute Taurello calls
A parley: let the Count wind up the war!
Richard, light-hearted as a plunging star,
Agrees to enter for the kindest ends
Ferrara, flanked with fifty chosen friends,
No horse-boy more for fear your timid sort
Should fly Ferrara at the bare report.
Quietly through the town they rode, jog-jog;
Ten, twenty, thirty . . . curse the catalogue

Of burnt Guelf houses! Strange Taurello shows
Not the least sign of life—whereat arose
A general growl: How? With his victors by?
I and my Veronese? My troops and I?
Receive us, was your word? so jogged they on,
Nor laughed their host too openly: once gone
Into the trap . . .
Six hundred years ago!
Such the time's aspect and peculiar woe
(Yourselves may spell it yet in chronicles,
Albeit the worm, our busy brother, drills
His sprawling path through letters anciently
Made fine and large to suit some abbot's eye)
When the new Hohenstauffen dropped the mask,
Flung John of Brienne's favor from his casque,
Forswore crusading, had no mind to leave
Saint Peter's proxy leisure to retrieve
Losses to Otho and to Barbaross,
Or make the Alps less easy to recross;
And thus confirming Pope Honorius' fear,
Was excommunicate that very year.
The triple-bearded Teuton come to life!
Groaned the Great League; and, arming for the strife,
Wide Lombardy, on tiptoe to begin,
Took up, as it was Guelf or Ghibellin,

Its cry; what cry?
The Emperor to come!
His crowd of feudatories, all and some
That leapt down with a crash of swords, spears, shields,
One fighter on his fellow, to our fields,
Scattered anon, took station here and there,
And carried it, till now, with little care—
Cannot but cry for him; how else rebut
Us longer? Cliffs an earthquake suffered jut
In the mid-sea, each domineering crest
Nothing save such another throe can wrest
From out (conceive) a certain chokeweed grown
Since o'er the waters, twine and tangle thrown
Too thick, too fast accumulating round,
Too sure to over-riot and confound
Ere long each brilliant islet with itself
Unless a second shock save shoal and shelf,
Whirling the sea-drift wide: alas, the bruised
And sullen wreck! Sunlight to be diffused
For that! Sunlight, 'neath which, a scum at first,
The million fibres of our chokeweed nurst
Dispread themselves, mantling the troubled main,
And, shattered by those rocks, took hold again
So kindly blazed it—that same blaze to brood
O'er every cluster of the multitude

Still hazarding new clasps, ties, filaments,
An emulous exchange of pulses, vents
Of nature into nature; till some growth
Unfancied yet exuberantly clothe
A surface solid now, continuous, one:
The Pope, for us the People, who begun
The People, carries on the People thus,
To keep that Kaiser off and dwell with us!
See you?
Or say, Two Principles that live
Each fitly by its Representative:
Hill-cat . . . who called him so, our gracefullest
Adventurer? the ambiguous stranger-guest
Of Lombardy (sleek but that ruffling fur,
Those talons to their sheath!) whose velvet purr
Soothes jealous neighbours when a Saxon scout
. . . Arpo or Yoland, is it? one without
A country or a name, presumes to couch
Beside their noblest; until men avouch
That of all Houses in the Trivisan
Conrad descries no fitter, rear or van,
Than Ecelo! They laughed as they enrolled
That name at Milan on the page of gold
For Godego, Ramon, Marostica,
Cartiglion, Bassano, Loria,

And every sheep-cote on the Suabian's fief!
No laughter when his son, the Lombard Chief
Forsooth, as Barbarossa's path was bent
To Italy along the Vale of Trent,
Welcomed him at Roncaglia! Sadness now—
The hamlets nested on the Tyrol's brow,
The Asolan and Euganean hills,
The Rhetian and the Julian, sadness fills
Them all that Ecelin vouchsafes to stay
Among and care about them; day by day
Choosing this pinnacle, the other spot,
A castle building to defend a cot,
A cot built for a castle to defend,
Nothing but castles, castles, nor an end
To boasts how mountain ridge may join with ridge
By sunken gallery and soaring bridge—
He takes, in brief, a figure that beseems
The griesliest nightmare of the Church's dreams,
A Signory firm-rooted, unestranged
From its old interests, and nowise changed
By its new neighbourhood; perchance the vaunt
Of Otho, "my own Este shall supplant
Your Este," come to pass. The sire led in
A son as cruel; and this Ecelin

Had sons, in turn, and daughters sly and tall,
And curling and compliant; but for all
Romano (so they style him) thrives, that neck
Of his so pinched and white, that hungry cheek
Prove 'tis some fiend, not him, men's flesh is meant
To feed: whereas Romano's instrument,
Famous Taurello Salinguerra, sole
I' the world, a tree whose boughs are slipt the bole
Successively, why shall not he shed blood
To further a design? Men understood
Living was pleasant to him as he wore
His careless surcoat, glanced some missive o'er,
Propped on his truncheon in the public way.
Ecelin lifts two writhen hands to pray
At Oliero's convent now: so, place
For Azzo, Lion of the . . . why disgrace
A worthiness conspicuous near and far
(Atii at Rome while free and consular,
Este at Padua to repulse the Hun)
By trumpeting the Church's princely son
Styled Patron of Rovigo's Polesine,
Ancona's March, Ferrara's . . . ask, in fine,
Your chronicles, commenced when some old monk
Found it intolerable to be sunk

(Vexed to the quick by his revolting cell)
Quite out of summer while alive and well:
Ended when by his mat the Prior stood,
Mid busy promptings of the brotherhood,
Striving to coax from his decrepit brains
The reason Father Porphyry took pains
To blot those ten lines out which used to stand
First on their charter drawn by Hildebrand.
The same night wears. Verona's rule of yore
Was vested in a certain Twenty-four;
And while within his palace these debate
Concerning Richard and Ferrara's fate,
Glide we by clapping doors, with sudden glare
Of cressets vented on the dark, nor care
For aught that 's seen or heard until we shut
The smother in, the lights, all noises but
The carroch's booming; safe at last! Why strange
Such a recess should lurk behind a range
Of banquet-rooms? Your finger—thus—you push
A spring, and the wall opens, would you rush
Upon the banqueters, select your prey,
Waiting, the slaughter-weapons in the way
Strewing this very bench, with sharpened ear
A preconcerted signal to appear;

Or if you simply crouch with beating heart
Bearing in some voluptuous pageant part
To startle them. Nor mutes nor masquers now;
Nor any . . . does that one man sleep whose brow
The dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o'er?
What woman stood beside him? not the more
Is he unfastened from the earnest eyes
Because that arras fell between! Her wise
And lulling words are yet about the room,
Her presence wholly poured upon the gloom
Down even to her vesture's creeping stir:
And so reclines he, saturate with her,
Until an outcry from the square beneath
Pierces the charm: he springs up, glad to breathe
Above the cunning element, and shakes
The stupor off as (look you) morning breaks
On the gay dress, and, near concealed by it,
The lean frame like a half-burnt taper, lit
Erst at some marriage-feast, then laid away
Till the Armenian bridegroom's dying-day,
In his wool wedding-robe; for he—for he—
"Gate-vein of this hearts' blood of Lombardy"
(If I should falter now)—for he is Thine!
Sordello, thy forerunner, Florentine!

A herald-star I know thou didst absorb
Relentless into the consummate orb
That scared it from its right to roll along
A sempiternal path with dance and song
Fulfilling its allotted period
Serenest of the progeny of God
Who yet resigns it not; his darling stoops
With no quenched lights, desponds with no blank troops
Of disenfranchised brilliances, for, blent
Utterly with thee, its shy element
Like thine upburneth prosperous and clear:
Still, what if I approach the august sphere
Named now with only one name, disentwine
That under current soft and argentine
From its fierce mate in the majestic mass
Leavened as the sea whose fire was mixt with glass
In John's transcendent vision, launch once more
That lustre? Dante, pacer of the shore
Where glutted Hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,
Unbitten by its whirring sulphur-spume—
Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope
Into a darkness quieted by hope—
Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye
In gracious twilights where his Chosen lie,

I would do this! if I should falter now—
In Mantua-territory half is slough
Half pine-tree forest; maples, scarlet-oaks
Breed o'er the river-beds; even Mincio chokes
With sand the summer through; but 'tis morass
In winter up to Mantua walls. There was
(Some thirty years before this evening's coil)
One spot reclaimed from the surrounding spoil,
Goito; just a castle built amid
A few low mountains; firs and larches hid
Their main defiles and rings of vineyard bound
The rest: some captured creature in a pound,
Whose artless wonder quite precludes distress,
Secure beside in its own loveliness,
So peered with airy head, below, above,
The castle at its toils the lapwings love
To glean among at grape-time. Pass within:
A maze of corridors contrived for sin,
Dusk winding-stairs, dim galleries got past,
You gain the inmost chambers, gain at last
A maple-panelled room: that haze which seems
Floating about the panel, if there gleams
A sunbeam over it will turn to gold
And in light-graven characters unfold

The Arab's wisdom everywhere; what shade
Marred them a moment, those slim pillars made,
Cut like a company of palms to prop
The roof, each kissing top entwined with top,
Leaning together; in the carver's mind
Some knot of bacchanals, flushed cheek combined
With straining forehead, shoulders purpled, hair
Diffused between, who in a goat-skin bear
A vintage; graceful sister-palms: but quick
To the main wonder now. A vault, see; thick
Black shade about the ceiling, though fine slits
Across the buttress suffer light by fits
Upon a marvel in the midst: nay, stoop—
A dullish grey-streaked cumbrous font, a group
Round it, each side of it, where'er one sees,
Upholds it—shrinking Caryatides
Of just-tinged marble like Eve's lilied flesh
Beneath her Maker's finger when the fresh
First pulse of life shot brightening the snow:
The font's edge burthens every shoulder, so
They muse upon the ground, eyelids half closed,
Some, with meek arms behind their backs disposed,
Some, crossed above their bosoms, some, to veil
Their eyes, some, propping chin and cheek so pale,

Some, hanging slack an utter helpless length
Dead as a buried vestal whose whole strength
Goes when the grate above shuts heavily;
So dwell these noiseless girls, patient to see,
Like priestesses because of sin impure
Penanced for ever, who resigned endure,
Having that once drunk sweetness to the dregs;
And every eve Sordello's visit begs
Pardon for them: constant as eve he came
To sit beside each in her turn, the same
As one of them, a certain space: and awe
Made a great indistinctness till he saw
Sunset slant cheerful through the buttress chinks,
Gold seven times globed; surely our maiden shrinks
And a smile stirs her as if one faint grain
Her load were lightened, one shade less the stain
Obscured her forehead, yet one more bead slipt
From off the rosary whereby the crypt
Keeps count of the contritions of its charge?
Then with a step more light, a heart more large,
He may depart, leave her and every one
To linger out the penance in mute stone.
Ah, but Sordello? 'Tis the tale I mean
To tell you. In this castle may be seen,

On the hill tops, or underneath the vines,
Or southward by the mound of firs and pines
That shuts out Mantua, still in loneliness,
A slender boy in a loose page's dress,
Sordello: do but look on him awhile
Watching ('tis autumn) with an earnest smile
The noisy flock of thievish birds at work
Among the yellowing vineyards; see him lurk
('Tis winter with its sullenest of storms)
Beside that arras-length of broidered forms,
On tiptoe, lifting in both hands a light
Which makes yon warrior's visage flutter bright
—Ecelo, dismal father of the brood,
And Ecelin, close to the girl he wooed
—Auria, and their Child, with all his wives
From Agnes to the Tuscan that survives,
Lady of the castle, Adelaide: his face
—Look, now he turns away! Yourselves shall trace
(The delicate nostril swerving wide and fine,
A sharp and restless lip, so well combine
With that calm brow) a soul fit to receive
Delight at every sense; you can believe
Sordello foremost in the regal class
Nature has broadly severed from her mass

Of men and framed for pleasure as she frames
Some happy lands that have luxurious names
For loose fertility; a footfall there
Suffices to upturn to the warm air
Half-germinating spices, mere decay
Produces richer life, and day by day
New pollen on the lily-petal grows,
And still more labyrinthine buds the rose.
You recognise at once the finer dress
Of flesh that amply lets in loveliness
At eye and ear, while round the rest is furled
(As though she would not trust them with her world)
A veil that shows a sky not near so blue,
And lets but half the sun look fervid through:
How can such love like souls on each full-fraught
Discovery brooding, blind at first to aught
Beyond its beauty; till exceeding love
Becomes an aching weight, and to remove
A curse that haunts such natures—to preclude
Their finding out themselves can work no good
To what they love nor make it very blest
By their endeavour, they are fain invest
The lifeless thing with life from their own soul
Availing it to purpose, to control,

To dwell distinct and have peculiar joy
And separate interests that may employ
That beauty fitly, for its proper sake;
Nor rest they here: fresh births of beauty wake
Fresh homage; every grade of love is past,
With every mode of loveliness; then cast
Inferior idols off their borrowed crown
Before a coming glory: up and down
Runs arrowy fire, while earthly forms combine
To throb the secret forth; a touch divine—
And the scaled eyeball owns the mystic rod:
Visibly through his garden walketh God.
So fare they—Now revert: one character
Denotes them through the progress and the stir;
A need to blend with each external charm,
Bury themselves, the whole heart wide and warm,
In something not themselves; they would belong
To what they worship—stronger and more strong
Thus prodigally fed—that gathers shape
And feature, soon imprisons past escape
The votary framed to love and to submit
Nor ask, as passionate he kneels to it,
Whence grew the idol's empery. So runs
A legend; Light had birth ere moons and suns,

Flowing through space a river and alone,
Till chaos burst and blank the spheres were strown
Hither and thither, foundering and blind,
When into each of them rushed Light—to find
Itself no place, foiled of its radiant chance.
Let such forego their just inheritance!
For there's a class that eagerly looks, too,
On beauty, but, unlike the gentler crew,
Proclaims each new revealment born a twin
With a distinctest consciousness within
Referring still the quality, now first
Revealed, to their own soul; its instinct nursed
In silence, now remembered better, shown
More thoroughly, but not the less their own;
A dream come true; the special exercise
Of any special function that implies
The being fair or good or wise or strong,
Dormant within their nature all along—
Whose fault? So homage other souls direct
Without, turns inward; how should this deject
Thee, soul? they murmur; wherefore strength be quelled
Because, its trivial accidents withheld,
Organs are missed that clog the world, inert,
Wanting a will, to quicken and exert,

Like thine—existence cannot satiate
Cannot surprise: laugh thou at envious fate,
Who from earth's simplest combination stampt
With individuality—uncrampt
By living its faint elemental life,
Dost soar to heaven's complexest essence, rife
With grandeurs, unaffronted to the last,
Equal to being all.
In truth? Thou hast
Life, then—wilt challenge life for us: thy race
Is vindicated so, obtains its place
In thy ascent, the first of us; whom we
May follow, to the meanest, finally,
With our more bounded wills?
Ah, but to find
A certain mood enervate such a mind,
Counsel it slumber in the solitude
Thus reached nor, stooping, task for mankind's good
Its nature just as life and time accord
(Too narrow an arena to reward
Emprize—the world's occasion worthless since
Not absolutely fitted to evince
Its mastery) or if yet worse befall,
And a desire possess it to put all

That nature forth, forcing our straitened sphere
Contain it; to display completely here
The mastery another life should learn,
Thrusting in time eternity's concern,
So that Sordello . . . Fool, who spied the mark
Of leprosy upon him, violet dark
Already as he loiters? Born just now—
With the new century—beside the glow
And efflorescence out of barbarism;
Witness a Greek or two from the abysm
That stray through Florence-town with studious air,
Calming the chisel of that Pisan pair . . .
If Nicolo should carve a Christus yet!
While at Sienna is Guidone set,
Forehead on hand; a painful birth must be
Matured ere San Eufemio's sacristy
Or transept gather fruits of one great gaze
At the noon-sun: look you! An orange haze—
The same blue stripe round that—and, i'the midst,
Thy spectral whiteness, mother-maid, who didst
Pursue the dizzy painter!
Woe then worth
Any officious babble letting forth
The leprosy confirmed and ruinous
To spirit lodged in a contracted house!

Go back to the beginning rather; blend
It gently with Sordello's life; the end
Is piteous, you shall see, but much between
Pleasant enough; meantime some pyx to screen
The full-grown pest, some lid to shut upon
The goblin! As they found at Babylon,
(Colleagues mad Lucius and sage Antonine)
Sacking the city, by Apollo's shrine
Its pride, in rummaging the rarities,
A cabinet; be sure, who made the prize
Opened it greedily; and out there curled
Just such another plague, for half the world
Was stung. Crawl in then, hag, and crouch asquat,
Keeping that blotchy bosom thick in spot
Until your time is ripe! The coffer-lid
Is fastened and the coffer safely hid
Under the Loxian's choicest gifts of gold.
Who will may hear Sordello's story told,
And how he never could remember when
He dwelt not at Goito; calmly then
About this secret lodge of Adelaide's
Glided his youth away: beyond the glades
On the fir-forest's border, and the rim
Of the low range of mountain, was for him

No other world: but that appeared his own
To wander through at pleasure and alone.
The castle too seemed empty; far and wide
Might he disport unless the northern side
Lay under a mysterious interdict—
Slight, just enough remembered to restrict
His roaming to the corridors, the vault
Where those font-bearers expiate their fault,
The maple-chamber, and the little nooks
And nests and breezy parapet that looks
Over the woods to Mantua; there he strolled.
Some foreign women-servants, very old,
Tended and crept about him—all his clue
To the world's business and embroiled ado
Distant a dozen hill-tops at the most.
And first a simple sense of life engrossed
Sordello in his drowsy Paradise;
The day's adventures for the day suffice—
Its constant tribute of perceptions strange
With sleep and stir in healthy interchange
Suffice, and leave him for the next at ease
Like the great palmer-worm that strips the trees,
Eats the life out of every luscious plant,
And when September finds them sere or scant

Puts forth two wondrous winglets, alters quite,
And hies him after unforeseen delight;
So fed Sordello, not a shard disheathed;
As ever round each new discovery wreathed
Luxuriantly the fancies infantine
His admiration, bent on making fine
Its novel friend at any risk, would fling
In gay profusion forth: a ficklest king
Confessed those minions! Eager to dispense
So much from his own stock of thought and sense
As might enable each to stand alone
And serve him for a fellow; with his own
Joining the qualities that just before
Had graced some older favourite: so they wore
A fluctuating halo, yesterday
Set flicker and to-morrow filched away;
Those upland objects each of separate name,
Each with an aspect never twice the same,
Waxing and waning as the new-born host
Of fancies, like a single night's hoar-frost,
Gave to familiar things a face grotesque;
Only, preserving through the mad burlesque
A grave regard: conceive; the orpine patch
Blossoming earliest on our log-house-thatch

The day those archers wound along the vines—
Related to the Chief that left their lines
To climb with clinking step the northern stair
Up to the solitary chambers where
Sordello never came. Thus thrall reached thrall;
He o'er-festooning every interval
As the adventurous spider, making light
Of distance, shoots her threads from depth to height,
From barbican to battlement; so flung
Fantasies forth and in their centre swung
Our architect: the breezy morning fresh
Above, and merry; all his waving mesh
Laughing with lucid dew-drops rainbow-edged.
This world of ours by tacit pact is pledged
To laying such a spangled fabric low
Whether by gradual brush or gallant blow:
But its abundant will was balked here: doubt
Rose tardily in one so fenced about
From most that nurtures judgment, care and pain:
Judgment, that dull expedient we are fain,
Less favoured, to adopt betimes and force
Stead us, diverted from our natural course
Of joys, contrive some yet amid the dearth,
Vary and render them, it may be, worth

Most we forego: suppose Sordello hence
Selfish enough, without a moral sense
However feeble; what informed the boy
Others desired a portion in his joy?
Or say a ruthful chance broke woof and warp—
A heron's nest beat down by March winds sharp,
A fawn breathless beneath the precipice,
A bird with unsoiled breast and filmless eyes
Warm in the brake—could these undo the trance
Lapping Sordello? Not a circumstance
That makes for you, friend Naddo! Eat fern-seed
And peer beside us and report indeed
If (your word) Genius dawned with throes and stings
And the whole fiery catalogue, while springs
Summers and winters quietly came and went,
Putting at length that period to content
By right the world should have imposed: bereft
Of its good offices, Sordello, left
To study his companions, managed rip
Their fringe off, learn the true relationship,
Core with its crust, their natures with his own;
Amid his wild-wood sights he lived alone:
As if the poppy felt with him! Though he
Partook the poppy's red effrontery

Till Autumn spoils their fleering quite with rain,
And, turbanless, a coarse brown rattling crane
Protrudes: that 's gone! yet why renounce, for that,
His disenchanted tributaries—flat
Perhaps, but scarce so utterly forlorn
Their simple presence may not well be borne
Whose parley was a transport once: recall
The poppy's gifts, it flaunts you, after all,
A poppy: why distrust the evidence
Of each soon satisfied and healthy sense?
The new-born Judgment answered: little boots
Beholding other creatures' attributes
And having none: or say that it sufficed,
Yet, could one but possess, oneself, (enticed
Judgment) some special office! Nought beside
Serves you? Well then, be somehow justified
For this ignoble wish to circumscribe
And concentrate, rather than swell, the tribe
Of actual pleasures: what now from without
Effects it?—proves, despite a lurking doubt,
Mere sympathy sufficient, trouble spared;
—He tasted joys by proxy, clearly fared
The better for them; thus much craved his soul.
Alas, from the beginning Love is whole

And true; if sure of nought beside, most sure
Of its own truth at least; nor may endure
A crowd to see its face, that cannot know
How hot the pulses throb its heart below;
While its own helplessness and utter want
Of means to worthily be ministrant
To what it worships, do but fan the more
Its flame, exalt the idol far before
Itself as it would ever have it be;
Souls like Sordello, on the contrary,
Coerced and put to shame, retaining Will,
Care little, take mysterious comfort still,
But look forth tremblingly to ascertain
If others judge their claims not urged in vain
—Will say for them their stifled thoughts aloud;
So they must ever live before a crowd:
Vanity, Naddo tells you.
Whence contrive
A crowd, now? These brave women just alive,
That archer-troop? Forth glided—not alone
Each painted warrior, every girl of stone,
—Nor Adelaide bent double o'er a scroll,
One maiden at her knees, that eve his soul
Shook as he stumbled through the arras'd glooms
On them, for, 'mid quaint robes and weird perfumes,

Started the meagre Tuscan up (her eyes
The maiden's also, bluer with surprise)
—But the entire out-world: whatever scraps
And snatches, song and story, dreams perhaps,
Conceited the world's offices, and he
Transferred to the first comer, flower or tree,
Nor counted a befitting heritage
Each, of its own right, singly to engage
Some Man, no other; such availed to stand
Alone: strength, wisdom, grace on every hand
Soon disengaged themselves; and he discerned
A sort of human life: at least, was turned
A stream of life-like figures through his brain
—Lord, Liegeman, Valvassor and Suzerain,
Ere he could choose, surrounded him; a stuff
To work his pleasure on; there, sure enough,
But as for gazing, what shall fix that gaze?
Are they to simply testify the ways
He who convoked them sends his soul along
With the cloud's thunder or a dove's brood-song?
While they live each its life, boast each its own
Peculiar dower of bliss, stand each alone
In some one point where something dearest loved
Is easiest gained—far worthier to be proved

Than aught he envies in the forest-wights!
No simple and self-evident delights,
But mixed desires of unimagined range,
Contrasts or combinations, new and strange,
Irksome perhaps, yet plainly recognised
By this, the sudden company—loves prized
By those who are to prize his own amount
Of loves. Once care because such make account,
Allow a foreign recognition stamp
The current value, and your crowd shall vamp
You counterfeits enough; and so their print
Be on the piece, 'tis gold, attests the mint
And good, pronounce they whom my new appeal
Is made to: if their casual print conceal—
This arbitrary good of theirs o'ergloss
What I have lived without, nor felt my loss—
Qualities strange, ungainly, wearisome,
—What matter? so must speech expand the dumb
Part sigh, part smile with which Sordello, late
No foolish woodland-sights could satiate,
Betakes himself to study hungrily
Just what the puppets his crude fantasy
Supposes notablest, popes, kings, priests, knights,
May please to promulgate for appetites;

Accepting all their artificial joys
Not as he views them, but as he employs
Each shape to estimate the other's stock
Of attributes, that on a marshalled flock
Of authorised enjoyments he may spend
Himself, be Men, now, as he used to blend
With tree and flower—nay more entirely, else
'Twere mockery: for instance, how excels
My life that Chieftain's? (who apprised the youth
Ecelin, here, becomes this month in truth,
Imperial Vicar?) Turns he in his tent
Remissly? Be it so—my head is bent
Deliciously amid my girls to sleep:
What if he stalks the Trentine-pass? Yon steep
I climbed an hour ago with little toil—
We are alike there: but can I, too, foil
The Guelfs' paid stabber, carelessly afford
St. Mark's a spectacle, the sleight o' the sword
Baffling their project in a moment? Here
No rescue! Poppy he is none, but peer
To Ecelin, assuredly: his hand,
Fashioned no otherwise, should wield a brand
With Ecelin's success—try, now! He soon
Was satisfied, returned as to the moon

From earth ; left each abortive boy's-attempt
For feats, from failure happily exempt,
In fancy at his beck. One day I will
Accomplish it ! Are they not older still
—Not grown up men and women ? 'Tis beside
Only a dream ; and though I must abide
With dreams now, I may find a thorough vent
For all myself, acquire an instrument
For acting what these people act ; my soul
Hunting a body out, obtain its whole
Desire some day ! How else express chagrin
And resignation, show the hope steal in
With which he let sink from an aching wrist
The rough-hewn ash bow, and a gold shaft hiss'd
Into the Syrian air, struck Malek down
Superbly ! Crosses to the breach ! God's Town
Was gained Him back ! Why bend rough ash-bows
So lives he : if not careless as before, [more ?
Comforted : for one may anticipate,
Rehearse the future ; be prepared when fate
Shall have prepared in turn real men whose names
Startle, real places of enormous fames,
Estes abroad and Ecelins at home
To worship him, Mantuas, Veronas, Rome

To witness it. Who grudges time so spent?
Rather test qualities to heart's content—
Summon them, thrice selected, near and far—
Compress the starriest into one star
So grasp the whole at once! The pageant 's thinned
Accordingly; from rank to rank, like wind
His spirit passed to winnow and divide;
Back fell the simpler phantasms; every side
The strong clave to the wise; with either classed
The beauteous; so, till two or three amassed
Mankind's beseemingnesses, and reduced
Themselves eventually, graces loosed,
And lavished strengths, to heighten up One Shape
Whose potency no creature should escape:
Can it be Friedrich of the bowmen's talk?
Surely that grape-juice, bubbling at the stalk,
Is some grey scorching Saracenic wine
The Kaiser quaffs with the Miramoline—
Those swarthy hazel-clusters, seamed and chapped,
Or filberts russet-sheathed and velvet-capped,
Are dates plucked from the bough John Brienne sent
To keep in mind his sluggish armament
Of Canaan . . . Friedrich's, all the pomp and fierce
Demeanour! But harsh sounds and sights transpierce

So rarely the serene cloud where he dwells
Whose looks enjoin, whose lightest words are spells
Upon the obdurate; that arm indeed
Has thunder for its slave; but where's the need
Of thunder if the stricken multitude
Hearkens, arrested in its angriest mood,
While songs go up exulting, then dispread,
Dispart, disperse, lingering overhead
Like an escape of angels? 'Tis the tune,
Nor much unlike the words the women croon
Smilingly, colourless and faint designed
Each as a worn-out queen's face some remind
Of her extreme youth's love-tales. Eglamor
Made that! Half minstrel and half emperor,
Who but ill objects vexed him? Such he slew.
The kinder sort were easy to subdue
By those ambrosial glances, dulcet tones;
And these a gracious hand advanced to thrones
Beneath him. Wherefore twist and torture this,
Striving to name afresh the antique bliss,
Instead of saying, neither less nor more,
He had discovered, as our world before,
Apollo? That shall be the name; nor bid
Me rag by rag expose how patchwork hid

The man—what thefts of every clime and day
Contributed to purfle the array
He climbs with (June's at deep) some close ravine
'Mid clatter of its million pebbles sheen,
Over which singing soft the runnel slipt
Elate with rains: into whose streamlet dipt
He foot, yet trod, you thought, with unwet sock—
Though really on the stubs of living rock
Ages ago it crenneled; vines for roof,
Lindens for wall; before him, aye aloof,
Flittered in the cool some azure damsel-fly,
Child of the simmering quiet, there to die:
Emerging whence, Apollo still, he spied
Mighty descents of forest; multiplied
Tuft on tuft, here, the frolic myrtle-trees;
There gendered the grave maple-stocks at ease;
And, proud of its observer, strait the wood
Tried old surprises on him; black it stood
A sudden barrier ('twas a cloud passed o'er)
So dead and dense the tiniest brute no more
Must pass; yet presently (the cloud despatched)
Each clump, forsooth, was glistering detached
A shrub, oak-boles shrunk into ilex-stems!
Yet could not he denounce the stratagems

He saw thro', till, hours thence, aloft would hang
White summer-lightnings; as it sank and sprang
In measure, that whole palpitating breast
Of Heaven, 'twas Apollo nature prest
At eve to worship.
Time stole: by degrees
The Pythons perished off; his votaries
Sunk to respectful distance; songs redeem
Their pains, but briefer; their dismissals seem
Emphatic; only girls are very slow
To disappear: his Delians! Some that glow
O' the instant, more with earlier loves to wrench
Away, reserves to quell, disdains to quench;
Alike in one material circumstance—
All soon or late adore Apollo! Glance
The bevy through, divine Apollo's choice,
A Daphne! We secure Count Richard's voice
In Este's counsels, one for Este's ends
As our Taurello, say his faded friends,
By granting him our Palma! The sole child,
They mean, of Agnes Este who beguiled
Ecelin, years before this Adelaide
Wedded and turned him wicked; but the maid
Rejects his suit, those sleepy women boast.
She, scorning all beside, deserves the most

Sordello: so conspicuous in his world
Of dreams sate Palma. How the tresses curled
Into a sumptuous swell of gold and wound
About her like a glory, even the ground [breathe
Was bright as with shed sunbeams; (breathe not,
Not)—poised, see, one leg doubled underneath,
Its small foot buried in the dimpling snow,
Rests, but the other, listlessly below,
O'er the couch-side swings feeling for cool air,
The vein-streaks swoln a richer violet where
The languid blood lies heavily; and calm
On her slight prop, each flat and outspread palm,
As but suspended in the act to rise
By consciousness of beauty, whence her eyes
Turn with so frank a triumph, for she meets
Apollo's gaze in the pine-glooms.
Time fleets
That's worst! Because the pre-appointed age
Approaches. Fate is tardy with the stage
She all but promised. Lean he grows and pale,
Though restlessly at rest. Hardly avail
Fancies to soothe him. Time steals, yet alone
He tarries here! The earnest smile is gone.
How long this might continue matters not:
For ever, possibly; since to the spot

None come: for lingering Taurello quits
Mantua at last, and light our lady flits
Back to her place disburthened of a care.
Strange—to be constant here if he is there!
Is it distrust? Oh, never! for they both
Goad Ecelin alike—Romano's growth
So daily manifest that Azzo 's dumb
And Richard wavers . . . let but Friedrich come!
—Find matter for the minstrelsy's report
Lured from the Isle and its young Kaiser's court
To sing us a Messina morning up;
Who, double rillets of a drinking cup,
Sparkle along to ease the land of drouth,
Northward to Provence that, and thus far south
The other: what a method to apprise
Neighbours of births, espousals, obsequies!
Which in their very tongue the Troubadour
Records; and his performance makes a tour,
For Trouveres bear the miracle about,
Explain its cunning to the vulgar rout,
Until the Formidable House is famed
Over the country—as Taurello aimed
Who introduced, although the rest adopt,
The novelty. Their games her absence stopped

Begin afresh now Adelaide, recluse
No longer, in the light of day pursues
Her plans at Mantua—whence an accident
That breaking on Sordello's mixed content
Opened, like any flash that cures the blind,
The veritable business of mankind.

BOOK THE SECOND.

THE woods were long austere with snow: at last
Pink leaflets budded on the beech, and fast
Larches, scattered through pine-tree solitudes,
Brightened, "as in the slumbrous heart o' the woods
Our buried year, a witch, grew young again
To placid incantations, and that stain
About were from her caldron, green smoke blent
With those black pines"—so Eglamor gave vent
To a chance fancy: whence a just rebuke
From his companion; brother Naddo shook
The solemnest of brows; Beware, he said,
Of setting up conceits in Nature's stead!
Forth wandered our Sordello. Nought so sure
As that to-day's adventure will secure
Palma, the forest-lady—only pass
O'er yon damp mound and its exhausted grass,

Under that brake where sundawn feeds the stalks
Of withered fern with gold, into those walks
Of pine, and take her! Buoyantly he went.
Again his stooping forehead was besprent
With dew-drops from the skirting ferns. Then wide
Opened the great morass, shot every side
With flashing water through and through; a-shine,
Thick steaming, all alive. Whose shape divine
Quivered i' the farthest rainbow-vapour, glanced
Athwart the flying herons? He advanced,
But warily; though Mincio leaped no more,
Each foot-fall burst up in the marish-floor
A diamond jet: and if you stopped to pick
Rose-lichen, or molest the leeches quick,
And circling blood-worms, minnow, newt or loach,
A sudden pond would silently encroach
This way and that. On Palma passed. The verge
Of a new wood was gained. She will emerge
Flushed, now, and panting; crowds to see; will own
She loves him—Boniface to hear, to groan,
To leave his suit! One screen of pine-trees still
Opposes: but—the startling spectacle—
Mantua, this time! Under the walls—a crowd
Indeed—real men and women—gay and loud

Round a pavilion. How he stood!
In truth
No prophecy had come to pass: his youth
In its prime now—and where was homage poured
Upon Sordello?—born to be adored,
And suddenly discovered weak, scarce made
To cope with any, cast into the shade
By this and this. Yet something seemed to prick
And tingle in his blood; a sleight—a trick—
And much would be explained. It went for naught—
The best of their endowments were ill bought
With his identity: nay, the conceit
This present roving leads to Palma's feet
Was not so vain . . . list! The word, Palma? Steal
Aside, and die, Sordello; this is real,
And this—abjure!
What next? The curtains, see,
Dividing! She is there; and presently
He will be there—the proper You, at length—
In your own cherished dress of grace and strength:
Most like the very Boniface . . .
Not so.
It was a showy man advanced; but though
A glad cry welcomed him, then every sound
Sank and the crowd disposed themselves around,

—This is not he, Sordello felt; while "Place
For the best Troubadour of Boniface,"
Hollaed the Jongleurs, "Eglamor whose lay
Concludes his patron's Court of Love to-day."
Obsequious Naddo strung his master's lute
With the new lute-string, Elys, named to suit
The song: He stealthily at watch, the while,
Biting his lip to keep down a great smile
Of pride: then up he struck. Sordello's brain
Swam; for he knew a sometime deed again;
So could supply each foolish gap and chasm
The minstrel left in his enthusiasm,
Mistaking its true version—was the tale
Not of Apollo? Only, what avail
Luring her down, that Elys an he pleased,
If the man dares no further? Has he ceased?
And, lo, the people's frank applause half done,
Sordello was beside him, had begun
(Spite of indignant twitchings from his friend
The Trouvere) the true lay with the true end,
Taking the other's names and time and place
For his. On flew the song, a giddy race,
After the flying story; word made leap
Out word; rhyme—rhyme; the lay could barely keep

Pace with the action visibly rushing past:
Both ended. Back fell Naddo more aghast
Than your Egyptian from the harassed bull
That wheels abrupt and, bellowing, fronts full
His plague, who spies a scarab 'neath his tongue,
And finds 'twas Apis' flank his hasty prong
Insulted. But the people—but the cries,
And crowding round, and proffering the prize!
(For he had gained some prize)—He seemed to shrink
Into a sleepy cloud, just at whose brink
One sight withheld him; there sat Adelaide,
Silent; but at her knees the very maid
Of the North Chamber, her red lips as rich,
The same pure fleecy hair; one curl of which,
Golden and great, quite touched his cheek as o'er
She leant, speaking some six words and no more;
He answered something, anything; and she
Unbound a scarf and laid it heavily
Upon him, her neck's warmth and all; again
Moved the arrested magic; in his brain
Noises grew, and a light that turned to glare,
And greater glare, until the intense flare
Engulfed him, shut the whole scene from his sense,
And when he woke 'twas many a furlong thence,

At home: the sun shining his ruddy wont;
The customary birds'-chirp; but his front [around
Was crowned—was crowned! Her scented scarf
His neck! Whose gorgeous vesture heaps the ground?
A prize? He turned, and peeringly on him
Brooded the women faces, kind and dim,
Ready to talk. The Jongleurs in a troop
Had brought him back, Naddo and Squarcialupe!
And Tagliafer; how strange! a childhood spent
Assuming, well for him, so brave a bent!
Since Eglamor, they heard, was dead with spite,
And Palma chose him for her minstrel.

Light
Sordello rose—to think, now; hitherto
He had perceived. Sure a discovery grew
Out of it all! Best live from first to last
The transport o'er again. A week he passed
Sucking the sweet out of each circumstance,
From the bard's outbreak to the luscious trance
Bounding his own achievement. Strange! A man
Recounted that adventure, and began
Imperfectly; his own task was to fill
The frame-work up, sing well what he sang ill,
Supply the necessary points, set loose
As many incidents of little use

—More imbecile the other, not to see
Their relative importance clear as he!
But for a special pleasure in the act
Of singing—had he ever turned, in fact,
From Elys, to sing Elys?—from each fit
Of rapture, to contrive a song of it?
True, this snatch or the other seemed to wind
Into a treasure, helped himself to find
A beauty in himself; for, see, he soared
By means of that mere snatch to many a hoard
Of fancies; as some falling cone bears oft
The eye, along the fir-tree-spire, aloft
To a dove's nest. Then how divine the cause
Such a performance should exact applause
From men if they have fancies too? Can Fate
Decree they find a beauty separate
In the poor snatch itself . . . our Elys, there,
("Her head that's sharp and perfect like a pear,
So close and smooth are laid the few fine locks
Coloured like honey oozed from topmost rocks
Sun-blanched the livelong summer")—if they heard
Just those two rhymes, assented at my word,
And loved them as I love them who have run
These fingers through those fine locks, let the sun

Into the white cool skin . . . . nay, thus I clutch
Those locks!—I needs must be a God to such.
Or if some few, above themselves, and yet
Beneath me, like their Eglamor, have set
An impress on our gift? So men believe
And worship what they know not, nor receive
Delight from. Have they fancies—slow, perchance,
Not at their beck, which indistinctly glance
Until by song each floating part be linked
To each, and all grow palpable, distinct?
He pondered this.
Meanwhile sounds low and drear
Stole on him, and a noise of footsteps, near
And nearer, and the underwood was pushed
Aside, the larches grazed, the dead leaves crushed
At the approach of men. The wind seemed laid;
Only, the trees shrunk slightly and a shade
Came o'er the sky although 'twas midday yet:
You saw each half-shut downcast violet
Flutter —a Roman bride, when they dispart
Her unbound tresses with the Sabine dart,
Holding that famous rape in memory still,
Felt creep into her curls the iron chill,
And looked thus, Eglamor would say—indeed
'Tis Eglamor, no other, these precede

Home hither in the woods. 'Twere surely sweet
Far from the scene of one's forlorn defeat
To sleep! thought Naddo, who in person led
Jongleurs and Trouveres, chanting at their head,
A scanty company; for, sooth to say,
Our beaten Troubadour had seen his day:
Old worshippers were something shamed, old friends
Nigh weary; still the death proposed amends:
Let us but get them safely through my song
And home again, quoth Naddo.

All along,
This man (they rest the bier upon the sand)
—This calm corpse with the loose flowers in its hand,
Eglamor, lived Sordello's opposite:
For him indeed was Naddo's notion right
And Verse a temple-worship vague and vast,
A ceremony that withdrew the last
Opposing bolt, looped back the lingering veil
Which hid the holy place—should one so frail
Stand there without such effort? or repine
That much was blank, uncertain at the shrine
He knelt before, till, soothed by many a rite,
The Power responded, and some sound or sight
Grew up, his own forever! to be fixed
In rhyme, the beautiful, forever; mixed

With his own life, unloosed when he should please,
Having it safe at hand, ready to ease
All pain, remove all trouble; every time
He loosed that fancy from its bonds of rhyme,
Like Perseus when he loosed his naked love,
Faltering; so distinct and far above
Himself, these fancies! He, no genius rare,
Transfiguring in fire or wave or air
At will, but a poor gnome that, cloistered up,
In some rock-chamber with his agate cup,
His topaz rod, his seed-pearl, in these few
And their arrangement finds enough to do
For his best art. Then, how he loved that art!
The calling marking him a man apart
From men—one not to care, take counsel for
Cold hearts, comfortless faces (Eglamor
Was neediest of his tribe) since verse, the gift,
Was his, and men, the whole of them, must shift
Without it, e'en content themselves with wealth
And pomp and power, snatching a life by stealth.
So Eglamor was not without his pride!
The sorriest bat which cowers through noontide
While other birds are jocund, has one time
When moon and stars are blinded, and the prime

Of earth is its to claim, nor find a peer;
And Eglamor was noblest poet here,
He knew, among the April woods he cast
Conceits upon in plenty as he past,
That Naddo might suppose him not to think
Entirely on the coming triumph; wink
At the one weakness! 'Twas a fervid child
That song of his—no brother of the guild
Had e'er conceived its like. The rest you know;
The exaltation and the overthrow;
Our poet lost his purpose, lost his rank,
His life—to that it came. Yet envy sank
Within him, as he heard Sordello out,
And, for the first time, shouted—tried to shout
Like others, not from any zeal to show
Pleasure that way: the common sort did so,
And what was Eglamor? who, bending down
The same, placed his beneath Sordello's crown,
Printed a kiss on his successor's hand,
Left one great tear on it, then joined his band
—In time; for some were watching at the door—
Who knows what envy may effect? Give o'er,
Nor charm his lips, nor craze him! (here one spied
And disengaged the withered crown)—Beside

His crown! How prompt and clear those verses rung
To answer yours! nay sing them! And he sung
Them calmly. Home he went; friends used to wait
His coming, anxious to congratulate,
But, to a man, so quickly runs report,
Could do no less than leave him, and escort
His rival. That eve, then, bred many a thought
What must his future life be: was he brought
So low, who was so lofty this spring morn?
At length he said, Best sleep now with my scorn,
And by to-morrow I devise some plain
Expedient! So he slept, nor woke again.
They found as much, those friends, when they returned
O'erflowing with the marvels they had learned
About Sordello's paradise, his roves
Among the hills and valleys, plains and groves,
Wherein, no doubt, this lay was roughly cast,
Polished by slow degrees, completed last
To Eglamor's discomfiture and death.
Such form the chanters now, and, out of breath,
They lay the beaten man in his abode,
Naddo reciting that same luckless ode,
Doleful to hear: Sordello could explore
By means of it, however, one step more

In joy; and, mastering the round at length,
Learnt how to live in weakness as in strength,
When from his covert forth he stood, addressed
Eglamor, bade the tender ferns invest,
Primeval pines o'ercanopy his couch,
And, most of all, his fame—(shall I avouch
Eglamor heard it, dead though he might look,
And laughed as from his brow Sordello took
The crown, and laid it on his breast, and said,
It was a crown, now, fit for poet's head?)
—Continue. Nor the prayer quite fruitless fell;
A plant they have yielding a three-leaved bell
Which whitens at the heart ere noon, and ails
Till evening; evening gives it to her gales
To clear away with such forgotten things
As are an eyesore to the morn: this brings
Him to their mind, and bears his very name.
So much for Eglamor. My own month came;
'Twas a sunrise of blossoming and May.
Beneath a flowering laurel thicket lay
Sordello; each new sprinkle of white stars
That smell fainter of wine than Massic jars
Dug up at Baiæ, when the south wind shed
The ripest, made him happier; filleted

And robed the same, only a lute beside
Lay on the turf. Before him far and wide
The country stretched: Goito slept behind
—The castle and its covert which confined
Him with his hopes and fears; so fain of old
To leave the story of his birth untold.
At intervals, 'spite the fantastic glow
Of his Apollo-life, a certain low
And wretched whisper winding through the bliss
Admonished, no such fortune could be his,
All was quite false and sure to fade one day:
The closelier drew he round him his array
Of brilliance to expel the truth. But when
A reason for his difference from men
Surprised him at the grave, he took no rest
While aught of that old life, superbly drest
Down to its meanest incident, remained
A mystery—alas, they soon explained
Away Apollo! and the tale amounts
To this: when at Vicenza both her Counts
Banished the Vivaresi kith and kin,
Those Maltraversi hung on Ecelin,
Reviling as he followed; he for spite
Must fire their quarter, though that self-same night

Among the flames young Ecelin was born
Of Adelaide, there too, and barely torn
From the roused populace hard on the rear
By a poor archer when his chieftain's fear
Was high; into the thick Elcorte leapt,
Saved her, and died; no creature left except
His child to thank. And when the full escape
Was known—how men impaled from chine to nape
Unlucky Prata, all to pieces spurned
Bishop Pistore's concubines, and burned
Taurello's entire household, flesh and fell,
Missing the sweeter prey—such courage well
Might claim reward. The orphan, ever since,
Sordello, had been nurtured by his prince
Within a blind retreat where Adelaide
(For, once this notable discovery made,
The past at every point was understood)
Can harbour easily when times are rude,
When Este schemes for Palma—would retrieve
That pledge, when Mantua is not fit to leave
Longer unguarded with a vigilant eye,
Taurello bides there so ambiguously
(He who can have no motive now to moil
For his own fortunes since their utter spoil)

As it were worth while yet (goes the report)
To disengage himself from us. In short,
Apollo vanished; a mean youth, just named
His lady's minstrel, was to be proclaimed
—How shall I phrase it? Monarch of the World.
But on the morning that array was furled
For ever, and in place of one a slave
To longings, wild, indeed, but longings save
In dreams as wild, suppressed—one daring not
Assume the mastery such dreams allot,
Until a magical equipment, strength
Grace, wisdom, decked him too,—he chose at length
(Content with unproved wits and failing frame)
In virtue of his simple Will, to claim
That mastery, no less—to do his best
With means so limited, and let the rest
Go by,—the seal was set: never again
Sordello could in his own sight remain
One of the many, one with hopes and cares
And interests nowise distinct from theirs,
Only peculiar in a thriveless store
Of fancies, which were fancies and no more;
Never again for him and for the crowd
A common law was challenged and allowed

If calmly reasoned of, howe'er denied
By a mad impulse nothing justified
Short of Apollo's presence: the divorce
Is clear: why needs Sordello square his course
By any known example? Men no more
Compete with him than tree and flower before;
Himself, inactive, yet is greater far
Than such as act, each stooping to his star,
Acquiring thence his function; he has gained
The same result with meaner mortals trained
To strength or beauty, moulded to express
Each the idea that rules him; since no less
He comprehends that function but can still
Embrace the others, take of Might his fill
With Richard as of Grace with Palma, mix
Their qualities, or for a moment fix
On one, abiding free meantime, uncramped
By any partial organ, never stamped
Strong, so to Strength turning all energies—
Wise, and restricted to becoming Wise—
That is, he loves not, nor possesses One
Idea that, star-like over, lures him on
To its exclusive purpose. Fortunate
This flesh of mine ne'er strove to emulate

A soul so various—took no casual mould
Of the first fancy and contracted, cold
Lay clogged forever thence, averse to change
As that. Whereas it left her free to range,
Remains itself a blank, cast into shade,
Encumbers little, if it cannot aid.
So, range, my soul! Who by self-consciousness
The last drop of all beauty dost express—
The grace of seeing grace, a quintessence
For thee: but for the world, that can dispense
Wonder on men, themselves that wonder—make
A shift to love at second hand and take
Those for its idols who but idolize,
Themselves,—that loves the soul as strong, as wise,
Whose love is Strength, is Wisdom,—such shall bow
Surely in unexampled worship now,
Discerning me!—
(Dear monarch, I beseech,
Notice how lamentably wide a breach
Is here! discovering this, discover too
What our poor world has possibly to do
With it! As pigmy natures as you please—
So much the better for you; take your ease;
Look on, and laugh; style yourself God alone;
Strangle some day with a cross olive-stone;

All that is right enough: but why want us
To know that you yourself know thus and thus?
Nay finish—)
—Bow to me conceiving all
Man's life, who see its blisses, great and small,
Afar—not tasting any: no machine
To exercise my utmost will is mine,
Therefore mere consciousness for me!—Perceive
What I could do, a mastery believe,
Asserted and established to the throng
By their selected evidence of Song
Which now shall prove whate'er they are, or seek
To be, I am—who take no pains to speak,
Change no old standards of perfection, vex
With no strange forms created to perplex,
But mean perform their bidding and no more,
At their own satiating-point give o'er,
And each shall love in me the love that leads
His soul to its perfection. Song, not Deeds,
(For we get tired) was chosen. Fate would brook
Mankind no other organ; He would look
For not another channel to dispense
His own volition and receive their sense
Of its existing, but would be content,
Obstructed else, with merely verse for vent—

Nor should, for instance, Strength an outlet seek
And striving be admired, nor Grace bespeak
Wonder, displayed in gracious attitudes,
Nor Wisdom, poured forth, change unseemly moods;
But he would give and take on Song's one point:
Like some huge throbbing-stone that, poised a-joint,
Sounds to affect on its basaltic bed
Must sue in just one accent: tempests shed
Thunder, and raves the landstorm: only let
That key by any little noise be set—
The far benighted hunter's halloo pitch
On that, the hungry curlew chance to scritch
Or serpent hiss it, rustling through the rift,
However loud, however low—all lift
The groaning monster, stricken to the heart.
  Lo ye, the world's concernment, for its part,
And this, for his, will hardly interfere!
Its businesses in blood and blaze this year
—But wile the hour away—a pastime slight
Till he shall step upon the platform: right!
And now thus much is settled, cast in rough,
Proved feasible, be counselled! thought enough,
Slumber, Sordello! any day will serve:
Were it a less digested plan! how swerve

To-morrow? Meanwhile eat these sun-dried grapes
And watch the soaring hawk there! Life escapes
Merrily thus.
He thoroughly read o'er
His truchman Naddo's missive six times more,
Praying him visit Mantua and supply
A famished world.
The evening star was high
When he reached Mantua, but his fame arrived
Before him: friends applauded, foes connived,
And Naddo looked an angel, and the rest
Angels, and all these angels would be blest
Supremely by a song—the thrice-renowned
Goito manufacture. Then he found
(Casting about to satisfy the crowd)
That happy vehicle, so late allowed,
A sore annoyance; 'twas the song's effect
He cared for, scarce the song itself: reflect!
In the past life what might be singing's use?
Just to delight his Delians, whose profuse
Praise, not the toilsome process which procured
That praise, enticed Apollo: dreams abjured,
No over-leaping means for ends—take both
For granted or take neither! I am loth

To say the rhymes at last were Eglamor's;
But Naddo, chuckling, bade competitors
Go pine; the Master certes meant to waste
No effort, cautiously had probed the taste
He'd please anon: true bard, in short, disturb
His title if they could; nor spur nor curb,
Fancy nor reason, wanting in him; whence
The staple of his verses, common sense:
He built on Man's broad nature—gift of gifts
That power to build! The world contented shifts
With counterfeits enough, a dreary sort
Of warriors, statesmen, ere it can extort
Its poet-soul—that's, after all, a freak.
(The having eyes to see and tongue to speak)
With our herd's stupid sterling happiness
So plainly incompatible that—yes—
Yes—should a son of his improve the breed
And turn out poet he were cursed indeed.
Well, there's Goito to retire upon
If the worst happen; best go stoutly on
Now! thought Sordello.

Ay, and goes on yet!
You pother with your glossaries to get
A notion of the Troubadour's intent—
His Rondels, Tenzons, Virlai or Sirvent—

Much as you study arras how to twirl
His Angelot, plaything of page and girl,
Once; but you surely reach, at last,—or, no!
Never quite reach what struck the people so,
As from the welter of their time he drew
Its elements successively to view,
Followed all actions backward on their course
And catching up, unmingled at the source,
Such a Strength, such a Weakness, added then
A touch or two, and turned them into Men.
Virtue took form, nor Vice refused a shape;
Here Heaven opened, there was Hell agape,
As Saint this simpered past in sanctity,
Sinner the other flared portentous by
A greedy People: then why stop, surprised
At his success? The scheme was realised
Too suddenly in one respect: a crowd
Praising, eyes quick to see, and lips as loud
To speak, delicious homage to receive,
Bianca's breath to feel upon his sleeve
Who said, "But Anafest—why asks he less
Than Lucio, in your verses? how confess
It seemed too much but yestereve!" The youth
Who bade him earnestly "avow the truth,

You love Bianca, surely, from your song;
I knew I was unworthy!" soft or strong,
In poured such tributes ere he had arranged
Etherial ways to take them, sorted, changed,
Digested: courted thus at unawares,
In spite of his pretensions and his cares
He caught himself shamefully hankering
After your obvious petty joys that spring
From real life, fain relinquish pedestal
And condescend with pleasures—one and all
To be renounced, no doubt; for thus to chain
Himself to single joys and so refrain
From tasting their quintessence, frustrates, sure,
His prime design; each joy must he abjure
Even for love of it.
He laughed: what sage
But perishes if from his magic page
He look because, at the first line, a proof
'Twas heard salutes him from the cavern roof?
On! Give thyself, excluding aught beside,
To the day's task; compel thy slave provide
Its utmost at the soonest; turn the leaf
Thoroughly conned; these lays of thine, in brief—
Cannot men bear, now, somewhat better?—fly
A pitch beyond this unreal pageantry

Of essences? the period sure has ceased
For such: present us with ourselves, at least,
Not portions of ourselves, mere loves and hates
Made flesh: wait not!
Awhile the poet waits
However. The first trial was enough:
He left imagining, to try the stuff
That held the imaged thing and, let it writhe
Never so fiercely, scarce allowed a tithe
To reach the light—his Language. How he sought
The cause, conceived a cure, and slow re-wrought
That Language, welding words into the crude
Mass from the new speech round him, till a rude
Armour was hammered out, in time to be
Approved beyond the Roman panoply
Melted to make it, boots not. This obtained
With some ado, no obstacle remained
To using it; accordingly he took
An action with its actors, quite forsook
Himself to live in each, returned anon
With the result—a creature, and by one
And one proceeded leisurely equip
Its limbs in harness of his workmanship.
Accomplished! Listen Mantuans! Fond essay!
Piece after piece that armour broke away

Because perceptions whole, like that he sought
To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought
As language: Thought may take Perception's place
But hardly co-exist in any case,
Being its mere presentment—of the Whole
By Parts, the Simultaneous and the Sole
By the Successive and the Many. Lacks
The crowd perceptions? painfully it tacks
Together thoughts Sordello, needing such,
Has rent perception into: it 's to clutch
And reconstruct—his office to diffuse,
Destroy: as difficult obtain a Muse
In short, as be Apollo. For the rest,
E'en if some wondrous vehicle exprest
The whole dream, what impertinence in me
So to express it, who myself can be
The dream! nor, on the other hand, are those,
I sing to over-likely to suppose
A higher than the highest I present
Now, and they praise already: be content
Both parties, rather; they with the old verse,
And I with the old praise—far go, fare worse!
A few adhering rivets loosed, upsprings
The angel, sparkles off his mail, and rings

Whirled from each delicatest limb it warps,
As might Apollo from the sudden corpse
Of Hyacinth have cast his luckless quoits.
He set to celebrating the exploits
Of Montfort o'er the Mountaineers.
Then came
The world's revenge: their pleasure now his aim
Merely—what was it? Not to play the fool
So much as learn our lesson in your school,
Replied the world: he found that every time
He gained applause by any given rhyme
His auditory recognised no jot
As he intended, and, mistaking not
Him for his meanest hero, ne'er was dunce
Sufficient to believe him—All at once.
His Will . . . conceive it caring for his Will!
—Mantuans, the main of them, admiring still
How a mere singer, ugly, stunted, weak,
Had Montfort at completely (so to speak)
His fingers' ends; while past the praise-tide swept
To Montfort, either's share distinctly kept,
The true meed for true merit—His abates
Into a sort he most repudiates,
And on them angrily he turns. Who were
The Mantuans, after all, that he should care

About their recognition, ay or no?
In spite of the convention months ago,
(Why blink the truth) was not he forced to help
This same ungrateful audience, every whelp
Of Naddo's litter, make them pass for peers
With the bright band of those Goito years,
As erst he toiled for flower or tree? Why there
Sate Palma! Adelaide's funereal hair
Ennobled the next corner. Ay, he strewed
A fairy dust upon that multitude
Although he feigned to take them by themselves;
His giants dignified those puny elves,
Sublimed their faint applause. In short he found
Himself still footing a delusive round,
Remote as ever from the self-display
He meant to compass, hampered every way
By what he hoped assistance. Wherefore then
Continue, make believe to find in men
A use he found not?
Weeks, months, years went by;
And, lo, Sordello vanished utterly,
Sundered in twain; each spectral part at strife
With each; one jarred against another life;
The Poet thwarting hopelessly the Man
Who, fooled no longer, free in fancy ran

Here, there; let slip no opportunities
Forsooth, as pitiful beside the prize
To drop on him some no-time and acquit
His constant faith (the Poet-half's to wit)
That waiving any compromise between
No joy and all joy kept the hunger keen
Beyond most methods—of incurring scoff
From the Man-portion not to be put off
With self-reflectings by the Poet's scheme [dream,
Though ne'er so bright; which sauntered forth in
Dress'd any how, nor waited mystic frames,
Immeasurable gifts, astounding claims,
But just his sorry self; who yet might be
Sorrier for aught he in reality
Achieved, so pinioned that the Poet-part,
Fondling, in turn of fancy, Verse; the Art
Developing his soul a thousand ways;
Potent, by its assistance, to amaze
The multitude with majesties, convince
Each sort of nature that same nature's prince
Accosted it: language, the makeshift, grew
Into a bravest of expedients, too;
Apollo, seemed it now, perverse had thrown
Quiver and bow away, the lyre alone

Sufficed: while, out of dream, his day's work went
To tune a crazy tenzon or sirvent—
So hampered him the Man-part, thrust to judge
Between the bard and the bard's audience, grudge
A minute's toil that missed its due reward!
But the complete Sordello, Man and Bard,
John's cloud-girt angel, this foot on the land,
That on the sea, with open in his hand
A bitter-sweetling of a book—was gone.
And if internal struggles to be one
That frittered him incessantly piece-meal,
Referred, ne'er so obliquely, to the real
Mantuans! intruding ever with some call
To action while he pondered, once for all,
Which looked the easier effort—to pursue
This course, still leap o'er paltry joys, yearn through
The present ill-appreciated stage
Of self-revealment and compel the age
Know him; or else, forswearing bard-craft, wake
From out his lethargy and nobly shake
Off timid habits of denial, mix
With men, enjoy like men: ere he could fix
On aught, in rushed the Mantuans; much they cared
For his perplexity! Thus unprepared,

The obvious if not only shelter lay
In deeds the dull conventions of his day
Prescribed the like of him: why not be glad
'Tis settled Palma's minstrel, good or bad,
Submits to this and that established rule?
Let Vidal change or any other fool
His murrey-coloured robe for philamot
And crop his hair; so skin-deep, is it not,
Such vigour? Then, a sorrow to the heart,
His talk! Whatever topics they might start
Had to be groped for in his consciousness
Strait, and as strait delivered them by guess:
Only obliged to ask himself, "What was,"
A speedy answer followed, but, alas,
One of God's large ones, tardy to condense
Itself into a period; answers whence
A tangle of conclusions must be stripp'd
At any risk ere, trim to pattern clipp'd,
They matched rare specimens the Mantua flock
Regaled him with, each talker from his stock
Of sorted o'er opinions, every stage,
Juicy in youth or desiccate with age,
Fruits like the fig-tree's, rathe-ripe, rotten-rich,
Sweet-sour, all tastes to take: a practice which

He too had not impossibly attained,
Once either of those fancy-flights restrained;
For, at conjecture how the words appear
To others, playing there what passes here,
And occupied abroad by what he spurned
At home, 'twas slipt the occasion he returned
To seize: he'd strike that lyre adroitly—speech,
Would but a twenty cubit plectre reach;
A clever hand, consummate instrument,
Were both brought close! each excellency went
For nothing else. The question Naddo asked
Had just a life-time moderately tasked
To answer, Naddo's fashion; more disgust
And more; why move his soul, since move it must
At minutes' notice or as good it failed
To move at all? The end was, he retailed
Some ready-made opinion, put to use
This quip, that maxim, ventured reproduce
Gestures and tones—at any folly caught
Serving to finish with, nor too much sought
If false or true 'twas spoken; praise and blame
Of what he said grew pretty well the same
—Meantime awards to meantime acts: his soul,
Unequal to the compassing a Whole,

Saw in a tenth part less and less to strive
About. And as for Men in turn . . . contrive
Who could to take eternal interest
In them, so hate the worst, so love the best!
Though in pursuance of his passive plan
He hailed, decried the proper way.

As Man

So figured he; and how as Poet? Verse
Came only not to a stand-still. The worse,
That his poor piece of daily work to do
Was not sink under any rivals; who
Loudly and long enough, without these qualms,
Tuned, from Bocafoli's stark-naked psalms,
To Plara's sonnets spoilt by toying with,
"As knops that stud some almug to the pith
Prickèd for gum, wry thence, and crinklèd worse
Than pursed-up eyelids of a river-horse
Sunning himself o' the slime when whirrs the breese"
Ha, ha! Of course he might compete with these
But—but—

Observe a pompion-twine afloat;
Pluck me one cup from off the castle-moat—
Along with cup you raise leaf, stalk and root,
The entire surface of the pool to boot.

So could I pluck a cup, put in one song
A single sight, did not my hand, too strong,
Twitch in the least the root-strings of the whole.
How should externals satisfy my soul?
Why that's precise the error Squarcialupe
(Hazarded Naddo) finds; the man can't stoop
To sing us out, quoth he, a mere romance;
He'd fain do better than the best, enhance
The subjects' rarity, work problems out
Therewith: now you're a bard, a bard past doubt,
And no philosopher; why introduce
Crotchets like these? fine, surely, but no use
In poetry—which still must be, to strike,
Based upon common sense; there's nothing like
Appealing to our nature! what beside
Was your first poetry? No tricks were tried
In that, no hollow thrills, affected throes!
The man, said we, tells his own joys and woes—
We'll trust him. Would you have your songs endure?
Build on the human heart!—Why to be sure
Yours is one sort of heart—but I mean theirs,
Ours, every one's, the healthy heart one cares
To build on! Central peace, mother of strength,
That's father of . . . nay, go yourself that length,

Ask those calm-hearted doers what they do
When they have got their calm! Nay, is it true
Fire rankles at the heart of every globe?
Perhaps! But these are matters one may probe
Too deeply for poetic purposes:
Rather select a theory that . . . yes [midway
Laugh! what does that prove? . . . stations you
And saves some little o'er-refining. Nay,
That's rank injustice done me! I restrict
The poet? Don't I hold the poet picked
Out of a host of warriors, statesmen—did
I tell you? Very like! as well you hid
That sense of power you have! True bards believe
Us able to achieve what they achieve—
That is, just nothing—in one point abide
Profounder simpletons than all beside:
Oh ay! The knowledge that you are a bard
Must constitute your prime, nay sole, reward!
So prattled Naddo, busiest of the tribe
Of genius-haunters—how shall I describe
What grubs or nips, or rubs, or rips—your louse
For love, your flea for hate, magnanimous,
Malignant, Pappacoda, Tagliafer,
Picking a sustenance from wear and tear

By implements it sedulous employs
To undertake, lay down, mete out, o'er-toise
Sordello? fifty creepers to elude
At once! They settled stanchly; shame ensued:
Behold the monarch of mankind succumb
To the last fool who turned him round his thumb,
As Naddo styled it! 'Twas not worth oppose
The matter of a moment, gainsay those
He aimed at getting rid of; better think
Their thoughts and speak their speech, secure to slink
Back expeditiously to his safe place,
And chew the cud—what he and what his race
Were really, each of them. Yet even this
Conformity was partial. He would miss
Some point, brought into contact with them ere
Assured in what small segment of the sphere
Of his existence they attended him;
Whence blunders—falsehoods rectify—a grim
List—slur it over! How? If dreams were tried,
His will swayed sicklily from side to side
Nor merely neutralized his waking act
But tended e'en in fancy to distract
The intermediate will, the choice of means:
He lost the art of dreaming: Mantua scenes

Supplied a baron, say, he sung before,
Handsomely reckless, full to running o'er
Of gallantries; abjure the soul, content
With body, therefore! Scarcely had he bent
Himself in dream thus low when matter fast
Cried out, he found, for spirit to contrast
And task it duly; by advances slight,
The simple stuff becoming composite,
Count Lori grew Apollo—best recall
His fancy! Then would some rough peasant-Paul
Like those old Ecelin confers with, glance
His gay apparel o'er; that countenance
Gathered his shattered fancy into one,
And, body clean abolished, soul alone
Sufficed the grey Paulician: by and by
To balance the ethereality
Passions were needed; foiled he sunk again.
Meanwhile the world rejoiced ('tis time explain)
Because a sudden sickness set it free
From Adelaide. Missing the mother bee
Her mountain hive Romano swarmed; at once
A rustle-forth of daughters and of sons
Blackened the valley. I am sick too, old,
Half crazed I think; what good 's the Kaiser's gold

To such an one? God help me! for I catch
My children's greedy sparkling eyes at watch—
He bears that double breastplate on, they say,
So many minutes less than yesterday!
Beside Monk Hilary is on his knees.
Now, sworn to kneel and pray till God shall please
Exact a punishment for many things
You know and some you never knew; which brings
To memory, Azzo's sister Beatrix
And Richard's Giglia are my Alberic's
And Ecelin's betrothed; the Count himself
Must get my Palma: Ghibellin and Guelf
Mean to embrace each other. So began
Romano's missive to his fighting-man
Taurello on the Tuscan's death, away
With Friedrich sworn to sail from Naples' bay
Next month for Syria. Never thunder-clap
Out of Vesuvius' mount like this mishap
Startled him. That accursed Vicenza! I
Absent, and she selects this time to die!
Ho, fellows, for Vicenza! Half a score
Of horses ridden dead he stood before
Romano in his reeking spurs: too late—
Boniface urged me, Este could not wait,

The chieftain stammered; let me die in peace—
Forget me! Was it I e'er craved increase
Of rule? Do you and Friedrich plot your worst
Against the Father: as you found me first
So leave me now. Forgive me! Palma, sure,
Is at Goito still. Retain that lure—
Only be pacified!
The country rung
With such a piece of news: on every tongue
How Ecelin's great servant, congeed off,
Had done a long day's service, so might doff
The green and yellow to recover breath
At Mantua, whither, since Retrude's death,
(The girlish slip of a Sicilian bride
From Otho's House he carried to reside
At Mantua till the Ferrarese should pile
A structure worthy her imperial style,
The gardens raise, their tenantry enshrine
She never lived to see) although his line
Was ancient in her archives and she took
A pride in him, that city, nor forsook
Her child though he forsook himself and spent
A prowess on Romano surely meant
For his own purposes—he ne'er resorts
If wholly satisfied (to trust reports)

With Ecelin. So forward in a trice
Were shows to greet him. Take a friend's advice,
Quoth Naddo to Sordello, nor be rash
Because your rivals (nothing can abash
Some folks) demur that we pronounced you best
To sound the great man's welcome; 'tis a test
Remember; Strojavacca looks asquint,
The rough fat sloven; and there's plenty hint
Your pinions have received of late a shock—
Out-soar them, cobswan of the silver flock!
Sing well! A signal wonder song's no whit
Facilitated.

Fast the minutes flit;
Another day, Sordello finds, will bring
The soldier, and he cannot choose but sing;
So quits, a last shift, Mantua—slow, alone:
Out of that aching brain, a very stone,
Song must be struck. What occupies that front?
Just how he was more awkward than his wont
The night before, when Naddo, who had seen
Taurello on his progress, praised the mien
For dignity no crosses could affect—
Such was a joy, and might not he detect
A satisfaction if established joys
Were proved imposture? Poetry annoys

Its utmost: wherefore fret? Verses may come
Or keep away! And thus he wandered, dumb
Till evening, when he paused, thoroughly spent,
On a blind hill-top; down the gorge he went,
Yielding himself up as to an embrace;
The moon came out; like features of a face
A querulous fraternity of pines,
Sad blackthorn clumps, leafless and grovelling vines
Also came out, made gradually up
The picture; 'twas Goito's mountain-cup
And castle. He had dropped through one defile
He never dared explore, the Chief erewhile
Had vanished by. Back rushed the dream, enwrapt
Him wholly. 'Twas Apollo now they lapped
Those mountains, not a pettish minstrel meant
To wear his soul away in discontent
Brooding on fortune's malice; heart and brain
Swelled; he expanded to himself again
As that thin seedling spice-tree starved and frail
Pushing between cat's head or ibis' tail
Crusted into the porphyry pavement smooth
—Suffered remain just as it sprung to soothe
The Soldan's pining daughter, never yet
Well in the chilly green-glazed minaret—

When rooted up the sunny day she died
And flung into the common court beside
Its parent tree. Come home, Sordello! Soon
Was he low muttering beneath the moon
Of sorrow saved, of quiet evermore,
How from his purposes maintained before
Only resulted wailing and hot tears.
Ah, the slim castle! dwindled of late years,
But more mysterious; gone to ruin—trails
Of vine thro' every loop-hole. Nought avails
The night as, torch in hand, he must explore
The maple chamber—did I say its floor
Was made of intersecting cedar beams?
Worn now with gaps so large there blew cold streams
Of air quite from the dungeon; lay your ear
Close and 'tis like, one after one, you hear
In the blind darkness water-drops. The nests
And nooks retained their long ranged vesture-chests
Empty and smelling of the iris-root
The Tuscan grated o'er them to recruit
Her wasted wits. Palma was gone that day,
Said the remaining women. Last, he lay
Beside the Carian group reserved and still.
The Body, the Machine for Acting Will

Had been at the commencement proved unfit;
That for Reflecting, Demonstrating it,
Mankind—no fitter: was the Will Itself
In fault?
His forehead pressed the moonlit shelf
Beside the youngest marble maid awhile;
Then, raising it, he thought, with a long smile,
I shall be king again! as he withdrew
The envied scarf; into the font he threw
His crown.
Next day, no poet! Wherefore? asked
Taurello, when the dance of Jongleurs masked
As devils ended; don't a song come next?
The master of the pageant looked perplext
Till Naddo's whisper came to his relief;
His Highness knew what poets were: in brief,
Had not the tetchy race prescriptive right
To peevishness, caprice? or, call it spite,
One must receive their nature in its length
And breadth, expect the weakness with the strength!
So phrasing, till, his stock of phrases spent,
The easy-natured soldier smiled assent,
Settled his portly person, smoothed his chin,
And nodded that the bull-chase might begin.

BOOK THE THIRD.

AND the font took them: let our laurels lie!
Braid moonfern now with mystic trifoly
Because once more Goito gets, once more,
Sordello to itself! A dream is o'er
And the suspended life begins anew;
Quiet those throbbing temples, then, subdue
That cheek's distortion! Nature's strict embrace,
Putting aside the past, shall soon efface
Its print as well—factitious humours grown
Over the true—loves, hatreds not his own—
And turn him pure as some forgotten vest
Woven of painted byssus, silkiest
Tufting the Tyrrhene whelk's pearl-sheeted lip,
Left welter where a trireme let it slip
I' the sea and vexed a Satrap; so the stain
O' the world forsakes Sordello with its pain

Its pleasure: how the tinct loosening escapes
Cloud after cloud! Mantua's familiar shapes
Die, fair and foul die, fading as they flit,
Men, women, and the pathos and the wit,
Wise speech and foolish, deeds to smile or sigh
For, good, bad, seemly or ignoble, die:
The last face glances through the eglantines,
The last voice murmurs 'twixt the blossomed vines
This May of the Machine supplied by Thought
To compass Self-perception idly sought
By forcing half himself—an insane pulse
Of a God's blood on clay it could convulse
Never transmute—on human sights and sounds
To watch the other half with; irksome bounds
It ebbs from to its source, a fountain sealed
Forever. Better sure be unrevealed
Than part-revealed: Sordello well or ill
Is finished with: what further use of Will?
—Point in the prime idea not realized,
An oversight, inordinately prized
No less, and pampered with enough of each
Delight to prove the whole above its reach.
To need become all natures yet retain
The law of one's own nature—to remain

Oneself, yet yearn . . . aha, that chesnut, think,
To yearn for this first larch-bloom crisp and pink,
With those pale fragrant tears where zephyrs staunch
March wounds along the fretted pine-tree branch!
Will and the means to show it, great and small
Material, spiritual, abjure them all
Save any so distinct as to be left
Amuse, not tempt become: and, thus bereft,
Say, just as I am fashioned would I be!
Nor, Moon, is it Apollo now but me
Thou visitest to comfort and befriend;
Swim thou into my heart and there an end
Since I possess thee! nay thus shut mine eyes
And know, quite know, by that heart's fall and rise
If thou dost bury thee in clouds and when
Out-standest: wherefore practise upon Men
To make that plainer to myself?
Slide here
Over a sweet and solitary year
Wasted: or simply notice change in him—
How eyes, bright with exploring once, grew dim
As satiate with receiving. Some distress
Occasioned, too, a sort of consciousness
Under the imbecility; nought kept
That down: he slept, but was aware he slept

And frustrate so: as who brainsick made pact
Erst with the overhanging cataract
To deafen him, yet may distinguish now
His own blood's measured clicking at his brow.
To finish. One declining Autumn day—
Few birds about the heaven chill and grey,
No wind that cared trouble the tacit woods—
He sauntered home complacently, their moods
According, his and Nature's. Every spark
Of Mantua life was trodden out; so dark
The embers that the Troubadour who sung
Hundreds of songs forgot, its trick the tongue,
Its craft the brain, how either brought to pass
Singing so e'er; that faculty might class
With any of Apollo's now. The year
Began to find its early promise sere
As well. Thus beauty vanishes! Your stone
Outlasts your flesh. Nature's and his youth gone,
They left the world to you and wished you joy.
When stopping his benevolent employ
A presage shuddered through the welkin; harsh
The earth's remonstrance followed. 'Twas the marsh
Gone of a sudden. Mincio in its place
Laughed a broad water in next morning's face

And, where the mists broke up immense and white
I' the steady wind, burnt like a spilth of light
Out of the crashing of a myriad stars.
And here was Nature, bound by the same bars
Of fate with him!
No: youth once gone is gone:
Deeds let escape are never to be done:
Leaf-fall and grass-spring for the year, but us—
Oh forfeit I unalterably thus
My chance? nor two lives wait me, this to spend
Learning save that? Nature has leisure mend
Mistake, occasion, knows she, will recur—
Landslip or seabreach how affects it her
With her magnificent resources? I
Must perish once and perish utterly!
Not any strollings now at even-close
Down the field-path, Sordello, by thorn-rows
Alive with lamp-flies, swimming spots of fire
And dew, outlining the black cypress' spire
She waits you at, Elys, who heard you first
Woo her the snow-month—ah, but ere she durst
Answer 'twas April! Linden-flower-time-long
Her eyes were on the ground; 'tis July, strong
Now; and because white dust-clouds overwhelm
The woodside, here or by the village elm

That holds the moon she meets you, somewhat pale,
But letting you lift up her coarse flax veil
And whisper (the damp little hand in yours)
Of love—heart's love—your heart's love that endures
Till death. Tush! No mad mixing with the rout
Of haggard ribalds wandering about
The hot torchlit wine-scented island-house
Where Friedrich holds his wickedest carouse
Parading to the gay Palermitans,
Soft Messinese, dusk Saracenic clans
From Nuocera, those tall grave dazzling Norse,
Clear-cheeked, lank-haired, toothed whiter than the morse,
Queens of the caves of jet stalactites
He sent his barks to fetch through icy seas,
The blind night seas without a saving-star,
And here in snowy birdskin robes they are,
Sordello, here, mollitious alcoves gilt
Superb as Byzant-domes the devils built
—Ah, Byzant, there again! no chance to go
Ever like august pleasant Dandolo,
Worshipping hearts about him for a wall,
Conducted, blind eyes, hundred years and all,
Through vanquished Byzant to have noted him
What pillar, marble massive, sardius slim,

'Twere fittest we transport to Venice' Square—
Flattered and promised life to touch them there
Soon, by his fervid sons of senators!
No more lifes, deaths, loves, hatreds, peaces, wars—
Ah, fragments of a Whole ordained to be!
Points in the life I waited! what are ye
But roundels of a ladder which appeared
Awhile the very platform it was reared
To lift me on—that Happiness I find
Proofs of my faith in, even in the blind
Instinct which bade forego you all unless
Ye led me past yourselves? Ay, Happiness
Awaited me; the way life should be used
Was to acquire, and deeds like you conduced
To teach it by a self-revealment (deemed
That very use too long). Whatever seemed
Progress to that was Pleasure; aught that stayed
Me reaching it—No Pleasure. I have laid
The roundels down; I climb not; still aloft
The platform stretches! Blisses strong and soft
I dared not entertain elude me; yet
Never of what they promised could I get
A glimpse till now! The common sort, the crowd,
Exist, perceive; with Being are endowed,

However slight, distinct from what they See,
However bounded: Happiness must be
To feed the first by gleanings from the last,
Attain its qualities, and slow or fast
Become what one beholds; such peace-in-strife
By transmutation is the Use of Life,
The Alien turning Native to the soul
Or body—which instructs me; I am whole
There and demand a Palma; had the world
Been from my soul to a like distance hurled
'Twere Happiness to make it one with me—
Whereas I must, ere I begin to Be,
Include a world, in flesh, I comprehend
In spirit now; and this done, what's to blend
With? Nought is Alien here—my Will
Owns it already; yet can turn it still
Less Native, since my Means to correspond
With Will are so unworthy 'twas my bond
To tread the very ones that tantalize
Me now into a grave, never to rise—
I die then! Will the rest agree to die?
Next Age or no? Shall its Sordello try
Clue after clue and catch at last the clue
I miss, that's underneath my finger too,

Twice, thrice a day, perhaps,—some yearning traced
Deeper, some petty consequence embraced
Closer! Why fled I Mantua then? Complained
So much my Will was fettered, yet remained
Content within a tether half the range
I could assign it?—able to exchange
My ignorance, I felt, for knowledge, and
Idle because I could thus understand—
Could e'en have penetrated to its core
Our mortal mystery, and yet forbore,
Preferred elaborating in the dark
My casual stuff, by any wretched spark
Born of my predecessors, tho' one stroke
Of mine had brought the flame forth! Mantua's yoke,
My minstrel's-trade, was to behold mankind,
And my own matter—just to bring my mind
Behold, just extricate, for my acquist,
Each object suffered stifle in the mist
Convention, hazard, blindness could impose
In their relation to myself.

He rose.

The level wind carried above the firs
Clouds, the irrevocable travellers,
Onward.

Pushed thus into a drowsy copse,
Arms twine about my neck, each eyelid drops
Under a humid finger; while there fleets
Outside the screen a pageant time repeats
Never again! To be deposed—immured
Clandestinely—still petted, still assured
To govern were fatiguing work—the Sight
Fleeting meanwhile! 'Tis noontide—wreak ere night
Somehow one's will upon it rather! Slake
This thirst somehow, the poorest impress take
That serves! A blasted bud displays you, torn,
Faint rudiments of the full flower unborn;
But who divines what petal coats o'erclasp
Of the bulb dormant in the Mummy's grasp
Taurello sent . . .

Taurello? Palma sent
Your Trouvere (Naddo interposing leant
Over the lost bard's shoulder) and believe
You cannot more reluctantly conceive
Than I pronounce her message: we depart
Together: what avail a poet's heart
Verona and her gauds? five blades of grass
Suffice him. News? Why, where your marish was,
On its mud-banks smoke rises after smoke
I' the valley like a spout of hell new-broke.

Oh, the world's tidings! little thanks, I guess,
For them. The father of our Patroness
Playing Taurello an astounding trick
Parts between Ecelin and Alberic
His wealth and goes into a convent: both
Wed Guelfs: the Count and Palma plighted troth
A week since at Verona: and she wants
You doubtless to contrive the marriage-chants
Ere Richard storms Ferrara. Your response
To Palma? Wherefore jest? Depart at once?
A good resolve! In truth I hardly hoped
So prompt an acquiescence. Have you groped
Out wisdom in the wilds here?—Thoughts may be
Over-poetical for poetry?
Pearl-white you minstrels liken Palma's neck,
And yet what spoils an orient like some speck
Of genuine white turning its own white grey?
You take me? Curse the cicales!
One more day—
One eve—appears Verona! Many a group,
(You mind) instructed of the osprey's swoop
On l nx and ounce, was gathering—Christendom
Sure to receive, whate'er it might be, from
The evening's purpose cheer or detriment
Since Friedrich only waited some event

Like this of Ghibellins establishing
Themselves within Ferrara, ere, as King
Of Lombardy, he'd glad descend there, wage
Old warfare with the Pontiff, disengage
His barons from the burghers, and restore
The rule of Charlemagne broken of yore
By Hildebrand. That eve-long each by each
Sordello sate and Palma: little speech
At first in that dim closet, face with face
Despite the tumult in the market place
Exchanging quick low laughters: now would gush
Word upon word to meet a sudden flush,
A look left off, a shifting lips' surmise—
But for the most part their two histories
Ran best thro' the locked fingers and linked arms.
And so the night flew on with its alarms
Till in burst one of Palma's retinue;
Now Lady, gasped he. Then arose the two
And leaned into Verona's air dead still.
A balcony lay black beneath until
Out 'mid a gush of torchfire grey-haired men
Came on it and harangued the people: then
Sea-like that people surging to and fro
Shouted, Hale forth the Carroch—trumpets, ho,

A flourish! run it in the ancient grooves—
Back from the bell! Hammer! that whom behooves
May hear the League is up! Peal! learn who list
Verona means not be the first break tryst
To-morrow with the League.
Enough. Now turn—
Over the Eastern cypresses: discern
You any beacon set a-glimmer?
Rang
The air with shouts that overpowered the clang
Of the incessant carroch even. Haste—
The Candle's at the gate-way! ere it waste
Each soldier stands beside, armed fit to march
With Tiso Sampier thro' that Eastern arch!
Ferrara's succoured, Palma!
Once again
They sate together; some strange thing in train
To say, so difficult was Palma's place
In taking, with a coy fastidious grace
Like the bird's flutter ere it fix and feed;
But when she felt she held her friend indeed
Safe, she threw back her curls, began implant
Her lessons; telling of another want
Goito's quiet nourished than his own;
Palma—to serve, as him—be served, alone

Importing; Agnes' milk so neutralised
The blood of Ecelin. Nor be surprised
If, while Sordello nature captive led,
In dream was Palma wholly subjected
To some out-soul which dawned not though she pined
Delaying still (pursued she) heart and mind
To live: how dared I let expand the force
Within me till some out-soul whose resource
It grew for should direct it? Every law
Of life, its fitnesses and every flaw,
Must that determine whose corporeal shape
Would be no other than the prime escape
And revelation to me of a Will
Orb-like o'ershrouded and inscrutable
Above except the point I was to know
Shone that myself, my powers, might overflow
So far, so much; as now it signified
Which earthly shape it henceforth chose to guide
Me by, whose lip selected to declare
Its oracles, what fleshly garb would wear:
—The first of intimations, whom to love;
The next, how love him. And that orb above
The castle-covert and the mountain-close
Slow in appearing, if beneath arose

Cravings, aversions, and our green precinct
Took pride in me at unawares distinct
With this or that endowment, how repress,
At once such jetting power shrunk to the rest!
Was I to have a chance touch spoil me, leave
My spirit thence unfitted to receive
The consummating spell?—that spell so near
Moreover: waits he not the waking year?
His almond-blossoms must be honey-ripe
By this; to welcome him fresh runnels stripe
The thawed ravines; because of him the wind
Walks like a herald. I shall surely find
Him now!
And chief that earnest April morn
Of Richard's Love-court was it time, so worn
And white her cheek, so idly her blood beat,
Sitting that morn beside the Lady's feet
And saying as she prompted; till outburst
One face from all the faces—not then first
She knew it; where in maple-chamber glooms,
Crowned with what sanguine-heart pomegranate blooms
Advanced it ever? Men's acknowledgment
Sanctioned her own: 'twas taken, Palma's bent,
She said.

And day by day the Tuscan dumb
Sat scheming, scheming; Ecelin would come
Gaunt, scared, Cesano baffles me, he'd say:
Better I fought it out my father's way!
Strangle Ferrara in its drowning flats
And you and your Taurello yonder—what's
Romano's business there? An hour's concern
To cure the froward Chief! induced return
Much heartened from those overmeaning eyes,
Wound up to persevere, his enterprise
Marked out anew, its exigent of wit
Apportioned, she at liberty to sit
And scheme against the next emergence, I—
To covet what I deemed their sprite, made fly
Or fold the wing—to con your horoscope:
For leave command those steely shafts shoot ope
Or straight assuage their blinding eagerness
To blank smooth snow: what semblance of success
To any of my plans for making you
Romano's lord? That Chief—her children too—
There Salinguerra would obstruct me sheer,
And the insuperable Tuscan here
Stayed me! But one wild eve that Lady died
In her lone chamber: only I beside:

Taurello far at Naples, and my sire
At Padua, Ecelin away in ire
With Alberic: she held me thus—a clutch
To make our spirits as our bodies touch—
And so began flinging the past up, heaps
Of uncouth treasure from their sunless sleeps
Within her soul; deeds rose along with dreams,
Fragments of many miserable schemes,
Secrets, more secrets, then—no, not the last—
'Mongst others, like a casual trick o' the past,
How . . . ay, she told me, gathering her face
—That face of hers into one arch-grimace
To die with . . .
Friend, 'tis gone! but not the fear
Of that fell laughing, heard as now I hear.
Nor faltered voice, nor seemed herself grow weak,
When i' the midst abrupt she ceased to speak
—Dead, as to serve a purpose, mark, for in
Rushed o' the very instant Ecelin
(How summoned who divines?) looking as if
Part understood he why his mate lay stiff
Already in my arms for, Girl, how must
I manage Este in the matter thrust
Upon me, how unravel their bad coil?
Since (he declared) 'tis on your brow—a soil

Like hers there! then said in a breath he lacked
No counsel after all, had signed no pact
With devils, nor was treason here or there,
Goito or Vicenza, his affair:
He 'd bury it in Adelaide's deep grave
And begin life afresh, nor, either, slave
For any Friedrich's or Taurello's sake!
What booted him to meddle or to make
In Lombardy? 'Twas afterward I knew
The meaning of his promise to undo
All she had done—why marriages were made,
New friendships entered on, old followers paid
In curses for their pains, people's amaze
At height, when passing out by Gate St. Blaise
He stopped short in Vicenza, bent his head
Over a friar's neck, had vowed, he said,
Long since, nigh thirty years, because his wife
And child were saved there, to bestow his life
On God, his gettings on the Church.

Exiled

Within Goito, still that dream beguiled
Her days and nights; 'twas found the orb she sought
To serve, those glimpses came of Fomalhaut
No other: how then serve it?—authorise
Him and Romano mingle destinies?

And straight Romano's angel stood beside
Her who had else been Boniface's bride,
For Salinguerra 'twas, the neck low bent,
The voice lightened to music as he meant
To learn not teach me how Romano waxed,
Wherefore it waned, and why if I relaxed
My grasp (think, I!) would drop a thing effete,
Frayed by itself, unequal to complete
The course and counting every step astray
A gain so much. Romano every way
Stable, a House now—why this starting back
Into the very outset of its track?
This recent patching-principle allied
Our House with other Houses—what beside
Concerned the apparition, yon grim Knight
Who followed Conrad hither in such plight
His utmost wealth was reckoned in his steed?
For Ecelo, that prowler, was decreed
A task in the beginning hazardous
To him as ever task can be to us,
But did the weather-beaten thief despair
When first our crystal cincture of warm air,
That binds the Trivisan as its spice-belt
(Crusaders say) the tract where Jesus dwelt,

Furtive he pierced and Este was to face—
Despaired Saponian Strength of Lombard Grace?
Said he for making surer aught made sure,
Maturing what already was mature?
No; his heart prompted Ecelo, Confront
Este, inspect yourself. What's nature? Wont.
Discard three-parts your nature and adopt
The rest as an advantage! Old Strength propped
The earliest of Podestas among
The Vincentines, no less than, while there sprung
His Palace up in Padua like a threat,
Their noblest spied a Grace unnoticed yet
In Conrad's crew. Thus far the object gained,
Romano was established; has remained—
For are you not Italian, truly peer
With Este? Azzo better soothes it ear
Than Alberic? or is this lion's-crine
From over-mount (this yellow hair of mine)
So weak a graft on Agnes Este's stock?
(Thus went he on with something of a mock)
Wherefore recoil then from the very fate
Conceded you, refuse to imitate
Your model farther? Este long since left
Being mere Este: as a blade its heft,

Este requires the Pope to further him:
And you, the Kaiser: whom your father's whim
Foregoes or, better, never shall forego
If Palma dares pursue what Ecelo
Commenced but Ecelin desists from: just
As Adelaide of Susa could intrust
Her donative (that's Piedmont to the Pope,
The Alpine-pass for him to shut or ope
'Twixt France and Italy) to the superb
Matilda's perfecting,—lest aught disturb
Our Adelaide's great counter-project for
Giving her Trentine to the Emperor
And passage here from Germany, shall you
Take it, my slender plodding talent, too—
Urged me Taurello with his half-smile.
He
As Patron of the scattered family
Conveyed her to his Mantua, kept in bruit
Azzo's alliances and Richard's suit
Until, the Kaiser excommunicate,
Nothing remains, Taurello said, but wait
Some rash procedure: Palma was the link,
As Agnes' child, between us, and they shrink
From losing Palma: judge if we advance
Your father's method your inheritance!

That day she was betrothed to Boniface
At Padua by Taurello's self, took place
The outrage of the Ferrarese: again,
That day she sought Verona with the train
Agreed for, by Taurello's policy
Convicting Richard of the fault, since she
Was present to annul or to confirm,
Richard, whose patience had outstayed its term,
Quitted Verona for the siege.
And now
What glory may engird Sordello's brow
For this? A month since Oliero sunk
All Ecelin that was into a Monk;
But how could Salinguerra so forget
His liege of thirty summers as grudge yet
One effort to recover him? He sent
Forthwith the tidings of the Town's event
To Oliero, adding, he, despite
The recent folly, recognised his right
To order such proceedings: should he wring
Its uttermost advantage out, or fling
This chance away? If not him, who was Head
Now of the House? Through me that missive sped;
My father's answer will by me return.
Behold! For him, he writes, no more concern

With strife than for his children with the plots
Of Friedrich. Old engagements out he blots
For aye: Taurello shall no more subserve
Nor Ecelin impose. Lest this unnerve
Him therefore at this juncture, slack his grip
Of Richard, suffer the occasion slip,
I, in his sons' default (who, mating with
Este, forsake Romano as the frith
Its mainsea for the firmland that makes head
Against) I stand, Romano; in their stead
Assume the station they desert, and give
Still, as the Kaiser's Representative,
Taurello licence he demands. Midnight—
Morning—by noon to-morrow, making light
Of the League's issue, we, in some gay weed
Like yours disguised together, may precede
The arbitrators to Ferrara; reach
Him, let Taurello's noble accents teach
The rest! then say if I have misconceived
Your destiny, too readily believed
The Kaiser's cause your own.

And Palma 's fled.

Though no affirmative disturbs the head
A dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o'er
Like the alighted planet Pollux wore,

Until, morn breaking, he resolves to be
Gate-vein of this heart's blood of Lombardy,
Soul to their body—have their aggregate
Of souls and bodies, and so conquer fate
Though he should live, a centre of disgust
Even, apart, core of the outward crust
He vivifies, assimilates. For thus
Bring I Sordello to the rapturous
Exclaim at the crowd's cry, because one round
Of life was quite accomplished and he found
Not only that a soul, howe'er its might,
Is insufficient to its own delight
Both in corporeal organs and in skill
By means of such to body forth its Will—
And, after, insufficient to apprise
Men of that Will, oblige them recognise
The Hid by the Revealed—but that, the last
Nor lightest of the struggles overpast,
His Will, bade abdicate, which would not void
The throne, might sit there, suffer be enjoyed
The same a varied and divine array
Incapable of homage the first way
Nor fit to render incidentally
Tribute connived at, taken by the by,

In joys: and if, thus warranted rescind
The ignominious exile of mankind
Whose proper service, ascertained intact
As yet (by Him to be themselves made act,
Not watch Sordello acting each of them)
Was to secure—if the true diadem
Seemed imminent while our Sordello drank
The wisdom of that golden Palma, thank
Verona's Lady in her Citadel
Founded by Gaulish Brennus legends tell—
And truly when she left him the sun reared
A head like the first clamberer's that peered
A-top the Capitol, his face on flame
With triumph, triumphing till Manlius came.
Nor slight too much my rhymes—"that spring,
Dispart, disperse, lingering overhead [dispread,
Like an escape of angels?" Rather say
My transcendental platan! mounting gay
(An archimage so courts a novice-queen)
With tremulous silvered trunk, whence branches sheen
Laugh out, thick foliaged next, a-shiver soon
With coloured buds, then glowing like the moon
One mild flame, last a pause, a burst, and all
Her ivory limbs are smothered by a fall,

Bloom-flinders and fruit-sparkles and leaf-dust,
Ending the weird work prosecuted just
For her amusement; he decrepit, stark,
Dozes; her uncontrolled delight may mark
Apart—
Yet not so, surely never so!
Only as good my soul were suffered go
O'er the lagune: forth fare thee, put aside
Entrance thy synod, as a God may glide
Out of the world he fills and leave it mute
A myriad ages as we men compute,
Returning into it without a break
I' the consciousness! They sleep, and I awake
O'er the lagune.
Sordello said once, note
In just such songs as Eglamor, say, wrote
With heart and soul and strength, for he believed
Himself achieving all to be achieved
By singer—in such songs you find alone
Completeness, judge the song and singer One
And either's purpose answered, his in it
Or its in him: while from true works (to wit
Sordello's dream-performances that will
Be never more than dream) escapes there still

Some proof the singer's proper life 's beneath
The life his song exhibits, this a sheath
To that; a passion and a knowledge far
Transcending these, majestic as they are,
Smoulder; his lay was but an episode
In the bard's life. Which evidence you owed
To some slight weariness, a looking-off
Or start-away, the childish skit or scoff
In "Charlemagne," for instance, dreamed divine
In every point except one restive line
(Those daughters!)—what significance may lurk
In that? My life commenced before that work,
Continues after it, as on I fare
With no more stopping possibly, no care
To jot down (says the bard) the why and how
And where and when of life as I do now:
But shall I cease to live for that? Alas
For you! who sigh, when shall it come to pass
We read that story, when will he compress
The future years, his whole life's business,
Into another lay which that one flout,
Howe'er inopportune it be, lets out
Engrosses him already while professed
To meditate with us eternal rest?

Strike sail, slip cable! here the galley 's moored
For once, the awning's stretched, the poles assured;
Noontide above; except the wave's crisp dash,
Or buzz of colibri, or tortoise' splash,
The margin's silent; out with every spoil
Made in our tracking, coil by mighty coil,
This serpent of a river to his head
I' the midst! Admire each treasure as we spread
The turf to help us tell our history
Aright: give ear then, gentles, and descry
The groves of giant rushes how they grew
Like demons' endlong tresses we sailed through,
How mountains yawned, forests to give us vent
Opened, each doleful side, yet on we went
Till . . . may that beetle (shake your cap) attest
The springing of a land-wind from the West!
Wherefore? Ah yes, we frolic it to-day:
To-morrow, and the pageant's moved away
Down to the poorest tent-pole: we and you
Part company: no other may pursue
Eastward your voyage, be informed what fate
Intends, if triumph or decline await
The tempter of the everlasting steppe.
I sung this on an empty palace-step

At Venice: why should I break off, nor sit
Longer upon my step, exhaust the fit
England gave birth to? Who's adorable
Enough reclaim a —— no Sordello's Will
Alack!—be queen to me? That Bassanese
Busied among her smoking fruit-boats? These
Perhaps from our delicious Asolo
Who twinkle, pigeons o'er the portico
Not prettier, bind late lilies into sheaves
To deck the bridge-side chapel, dropping leaves
Soiled by their own loose gold-meal? Ah, beneath
The cool arch stoops she, brownest-cheek! Her wreath
Endures a month—a half month—if I make
A queen of her, continue for her sake
Sordello's story? Nay, that Paduan girl
Splashes with barer legs where a live whirl
In the dead black Giudecca proves sea-weed
Drifting has sucked down three, four, all indeed
Save one pale-red striped, pale-blue turbaned post
For gondolas.
You sad disheveled ghost
That pluck at me and point, are you advised
I breathe? Let stay those girls (e'en her disguised
—Jewels in the locks that love no crownet like
Their native field-buds and the green wheat spike,

So fair!—Who left this end of June's turmoil,
Shook off, as might a lily its gold soil,
Pomp, save a foolish gem or two, and free
Came join the peasants o'er the kissing sea.)
Look they too happy, too tricked out? Confess
You have so niggard stock of happiness
To share that, do one's uttermost, dear wretch,
One labours ineffectually stretch
It o'er you so that mother, children, both
May equitably flaunt the sumpter-cloth!
No: tear the robe yet farther: be content
With seeing some few score pre-eminent
Through shreds of it, acknowledged happy wights,
Engrossing what should furnish all, by rights—
(At home we dizen scholars, chiefs and kings,
But in this magic weather hardly clings
The old garb gracefully: Venice, a type
Of Life, 'twixt blue and blue extends, a stripe,
As Life, the somewhat, hangs 'twixt nought and nought:
'Tis Venice, and 'tis Life—as good you sought
To spare me the Piazza's slippery stone,
Or stay me thrid her cross canals alone,
As hinder Life what seems the single good
Sole purpose, one thing to be understood

Of Life)—best, be they Peasants, be they Queens,
Take them, I say, made happy any means,
Parade them for the common credit, vouch
A luckless residue we send to crouch
In corners out of sight was just as framed
For happiness, its portion might have claimed
And so, could we concede that portion, stalked
Fastuous as any—such my project, baulked
Already; hardly venture I adjust
A lappet when I find you! To mistrust
Me! nor unreasonably. You, no doubt,
Have the true knack of tiring suitors out
With those thin lips on tremble, lashless eyes
Inveterately tear-shot—there, be wise
Mistress of mine, there, there, as if I meant
You insult! Shall your friend (not slave) be shent
For speaking home? Beside care-bit erased
Broken-up beauties ever took my taste
Supremely, and I love you more, far more
That she I looked should foot Life's temple-floor—
Years ago, leagues at distance, when and where
A whisper came, Seek others, since thy care
Is found, a life's provision; if a race
Should be thy mistress, and into one face

The many faces crowd? Ah, had I, judge,
Or no, your secret? Rough apparel—grudge
All ornaments save tag or tassel worn
To hint we are not thoroughly forlorn—
Slouch bonnet, unloop mantle, careless go
Alone (that's saddest but it must be so)
Through Venice, sing now and now glance aside,
Aught desultory or undignified,
And, ravishingest lady, will you pass
Or not each formidable group, the mass
Before the Basilike (that feast gone by,
God's day, the great June Corpus Domini)
And wistfully foregoing proper men
Come timid up to me for alms? And then
The luxury to hesitate, feign do
Some unexampled grace, when whom but you
Dare I bestow your own upon? And hear
Me out before you say it is to sneer
I call you ravishing, for I regret
Little that she, whose early foot was set
Forth as she'd plant it on a pedestal,
Now i' the silent city, seems to fall
Towards me—no wreath, only a lip's unrest
To quiet, surcharged eyelids to be pressed

Dry of their tears upon my bosom : strange
Such sad chance should produce in thee such change,
My love ! warped men, souls, bodies ! yet God spoke
Of right-hand foot and eye—selects our yoke
Sordello ! as your poetship may find :
So sleep upon my shoulder, child, nor mind
Their foolish talk ; we'll manage reinstate
The matter ; ask moreover, when they prate
Of evil men past hope, don't each contrive
Despite the evil you abuse to live ?
Keeping, each losel, thro' a maze of lies,
His own conceit of truth ? to which he hies
By obscure tortuous windings, if you will,
But to himself not inaccessible ;
He sees it, and his lies are for the crowd
Who cannot see ; some fancied right allowed
His vilest wrong, empowered the fellow clutch
One pleasure from the multitude of such
Denied him : then assert, all men appear
To think all better than themselves, by here
Trusting a crowd they wrong ; but really, say,
All men think all men stupider than they
Since save themselves no other comprehends
The complicated scheme to make amends

—Evil, the scheme by which, thro' Ignorance
Good labours to exist. A slight advance
Merely to find the sickness you die through
And nought beside: but if one can't eschew
One's portion in the common lot, at least
One can avoid an ignorance increased
Tenfold by dealing out hint after hint
How nought is like dispensing without stint
The water of life—so easy to dispense
Beside, when one has probed the centre whence
Commotion's born—could tell you of it all
—Meantime, just meditate my madrigal
O' the mugwort that conceals a dewdrop safe!
What, dullard? we and you in smothery chafe
Babes, baldheads, stumbled thus far into Zin
The Horrid, getting neither out nor in,
A hungry sun above us, sands among
Our throats, each dromedary lolls a tongue,
Each camel churns a sick and frothy chap,
And you, 'twixt tales of Potiphar's mishap
And sonnets on the earliest ass that spoke,
Remark you wonder any one needs choak
With founts about! Potsherd him, Gibeonites,
While awkwardly enough your Moses smites

The rock though he forego his Promised Land,
Thereby, have Satan claim his carcass, and
Dance, forsooth, Metaphysic Poet . . . ah
Mark ye the dim first oozings? Meribah!
And quaffing at the fount my courage gained
Recall—not that I prompt ye—who explained . . .
Presumptuous! interrupts one. You not I
'Tis, Brother, marvel at and magnify
Mine office: office, quotha? can we get
To the beginning of the office yet?
What do we here? simply experiment
Each on the other's power and its intent
When elsewhere tasked, if this of mine were trucked
For thine to either's profit,—watch construct,
In short, an engine: with a finished one
What it can do is all, nought how 'tis done;
But this of ours yet in probation, dusk
A kernel of strange wheelwork thro' its husk
Grows into shape by quarters and by halves;
Remark this tooth's spring, wonder what that valve's
Fall bodes, presume each faculty's device,
Make out each other more or less precise—
The scope of the whole engine's to be proved—
We die: which means to say the whole's removed,

Dismounted wheel by wheel, that complex gin,
To be set up anew elsewhere, begin
A task indeed but with a clearer clime
Than the murk lodgment of our building-time:
And then, I grant you, it behoves forget
How 'tis done—all that must amuse us yet
So long: and while thou turnest on thy heel
Pray that I be not busy slitting steel
Or shredding brass upon a virgin shore
Under a cluster of fresh stars, before
I name a tithe the wheels I trust to do!
So occupied, then, are we: hitherto,
At present, and a weary while to come,
The office of ourselves nor blind nor dumb
And seeing somewhat of man's state, has been,
The worst of us, to say they so have seen;
The better, what it was they saw; the best,
Impart the gift of seeing to the rest:
So that I glance, says such an one, around,
And there's no face but I can read profound
Disclosures in; this stands for hope, that—fear,
And for a speech, a deed in proof, look here!
Stoop, else the strings of blossom, where the nuts
O'erarch, will blind thee! said I not? she shuts

Both eyes this time, so close the hazels meet!
Thus, prisoned in the Piombi, I repeat
Events one rove occasioned, o'er and o'er,
Putting 'twixt me and madness evermore
Thy sweet shape, Elys! therefore stoop—
That's truth!
(Applaud you) the incarcerated youth
Would say that!
Youth? Plara the bard? set down
That Plara spent his youth in a grim town
Whose cramped ill-featured streets huddled about
The minster for protection, never out
Of its black belfry's shadow or bells' roar:
Brighter the sun illumed the suburbs, more
Ugly and absolute that shade's reproof
For any chance escape of joy some roof
Taller than they allowed the rest detect
Before the sole permitted laugh (suspect [cheek's
Who could, 'twas meant for laughter, that ploughed
Repulsive gleam!) when the sun stopped both peaks
Of the cleft belfry like a fiery wedge,
Then sunk, a huge flame on its socket's edge,
Whose leavings on the grey glass oriel-pane
Were ghastly some few minutes more: no rain—

The Minster minded that! in heaps the dust
Lay every where: that town, the Minster's trust,
Held Plara; who, its denizen, bade hail
In twice twelve sonnets, Naddo, Tempe's vale.
Exact the town, the minster and the street!
As all mirth triumphs, sadness means defeat:
Lust triumphs and is gay, Love's triumphed o'er
And sad: but Lucio's sad: I said before
Love's sad, not Lucio; one who loves may be
As gay his love has leave to hope, as he
Downcast his lusts' desire escapes the springe:
'Tis of the mood itself I speak, what tinge
Determines it, else colourless, or mirth,
Or melancholy, as from Heaven or Earth.
Ay, that's the variation's gist! Indeed?
Thus far advanced in safety then, proceed!
And having seen too what I saw, be bold
Enough encounter what I do behold
(That's sure) but you must take on trust! Attack
The use and purpose of such sights! Alack,
Not so unwisely hastes the crowd dispense
On Salinguerras praise in preference
To the Sordellos: men of action these!
Who seeing just as little as you please

Yet turn that little to account; engage
With, do not gaze at; carry on a stage
The work o' the world, not merely make report
The work existed ere their time—In short,
When at some future no-time a brave band
Sees, using what it sees, then shake my hand
In heaven, my brother! Meanwhile where's the hurt
To keep the Makers-see on the alert
At whose defection mortals stare aghast
As though Heaven's bounteous windows were slammed
Incontinent? whereas all you beneath [fast
Should scowl at, curse them, bruise lips, break their
Who ply the pullies for neglecting you: [teeth
And therefore have I moulded, made anew
A Man, delivered to be turned and tried,
Be angry with or pleased at. On your side
Have ye times, places, actors of your own?
Try them upon Sordello once full-grown,
And then—ah then! If Hercules first parched
His foot in Egypt only to be marched
A sacrifice for Jove with pomp to suit,
What chance have I? The demigod was mute
Till at the altar, where time out of mind
Such guests became oblations, chaplets twined

His forehead long enough, and he began
Slaying the slayers, nor escaped a man—
Take not affront, my gentle audience! whom
No Hercules shall make his hecatomb
Believe, nor from his brows your chaplet rend—
That's your kind suffrage, yours, nay, yours, my friend
Whose great verse blares unintermittent on
Like any trumpeter at Marathon,
He'll testify who when Platæas grew scant
Put up with Ætna for a stimulant!
And well too, I acknowledged, as it loomed
Over the Midland sea that morn, presumed
All day, demolished by the blazing West
At eve, while towards it tilting cloudlets prest
Like Persian ships for Salamis. Friend, wear
A crest proud as desert while I declare
Had I a flawless ruby fit to wring
A tear its colour from that painted king
To lose, I would, for that one smile which went
To my heart, fling it in the sea content
Wearing your verse in place, an amulet
Sovereign against low-thoughtedness and fret!
My English Eyebright, if you are not glad
That, as I stopped my task awhile, the sad

Disheveled form wherein I put mankind
To come at times and keep my pact in mind
Renewed me,—hear no crickets in the hedge
Nor let a glowworm spot the river's edge
At home, and may the summer showers gush
Without a warning from the missel thrush !
For, Eyebright, what I sing's the fate of such
As find our common nature (overmuch
Despised because restricted and unfit
To bear the burthen they impose on it)
Cling when they would discard it; craving strength
To leap from the allotted world, at length
'Tis left—they floundering without a term
Each a God's germ, but doomed remain a germ
In unexpanded infancy, assure
Yourself, nor misconceive my portraiture
Nor undervalue its adornments quaint !
What seems a fiend perchance may prove a saint :
Ponder a story ancient pens transmit,
Then say if you condemn me or acquit.
John the Beloved, banished Antioch
For Patmos, bade collectively his flock
Farewell but set apart the closing eve
To comfort some his exile most would grieve

He knew: a touching spectacle, that house
In motion to receive him! Xanthus' spouse
You missed, made panther's meat a month since; but
Xanthus himself (for 'twas his nephew shut
'Twixt boards and sawn asunder) Polycarp,
Soft Charicle next year no wheel could warp
To swear by Cæsar's fortune, with the rest
Were ranged; thro' whom the grey disciple prest
Busily blessing right and left, just stopt
To pat one infant's curls the hangman cropt
Soon after, reached the portal; on its hinge
The door turns and he enters—what deep twinge
Ruins the smiling mouth, those wide eyes fix
Whereon? How like some spectral candlestick's
Branch the disciple's arms! Dead swooned he, woke
Anon, heaved sigh, made shift to gasp heart-broke
Get thee behind me Satan! have I toiled
To no more purpose? is the gospel foiled
Here too, and o'er my son's, my Xanthus' hearth,
Pourtrayed with sooty garb and features swarth—
Ah Xanthus, am I to thy roof beguiled
To see the—the—the Devil domiciled?
Whereto sobbed Xanthus, Father, 'tis yourself
Installed, a limning which our utmost pelf

Went to procure against to-morrow's loss,
And that's no twy-prong but a pastoral cross
You're painted with! The puckered brows unfold—
And you shall hear Sordello's story told.

BOOK THE FOURTH.

MEANTIME Ferrara lay in rueful case;
The lady-city, for whose sole embrace
Her pair of suitors struggled, felt their arms
A brawny mischief to the fragile charms
Each tugged for—one discovering to twist
Her tresses twice or thrice about his wrist
Secured a point of vantage—one, how best
He'd parry that by planting in her breast
His elbow-spike—both parties too intent
For noticing, howe'er the battle went,
Its conqueror would have a corpse to kiss.
May Boniface be duly damned for this!
Howled some old Ghibellin as up he turned,
From the wet heap of rubbish where they burned
His house, a little scull with dazzling teeth:
A boon, sweet Christ—let Salinguerra seethe

In hell for ever, Christ, and let myself
Be there to laugh at him! moaned some young Guelf
Stumbling upon a shrivelled hand nailed fast
To the charred lintel of the doorway last
His father stood within to bid him speed.
The thoroughfares looked overrun with weed
—Docks, quitchgrass, loathly mallows no man plants.
The stranger none of its inhabitants
Crept out of doors to taste fresh air again,
Or ask the purpose of a sumptuous train
Admitted on a morning; every town
Of the East League was come by envoy down
To treat for Richard's ransom: here you saw
The Vicentine, here snowy oxen draw
The Paduan carroch, its vermilion cross
On its white field: a-tiptoe o'er the fosse
Looked Legate Montelungo wistfully
After the flock of steeples he might spy
In Este's time, gone (doubts he) long ago
To mend the ramparts—sure the laggards know
The Pope 's as good as here! They paced the streets
More soberly. At last, Taurello greets
The League, announced a pursuivant,—will match
Its courtesy, and labours to despatch

At earliest Tito, Friedrich's Pretor, sent
On pressing matters from his post at Trent
With Mainard Count of Tyrol,—simply waits
Their going to receive the delegates.
Tito! Our delegates exchanged a glance,
And, keeping the main way, admired askance
The lazy engines of outlandish birth
Couched like a king each on its bank of earth—
Arbalist, manganel, and catapult;
While stationed by, as waiting a result,
Lean silent gangs of mercenaries ceased
Working to watch the strangers—this, at least,
Were better spared; he scarce presumes gainsay
The League's decision! Get our friend away
And profit for the future: how else teach
Azzo 'tis not so safe within claw's reach
Till Salinguerra's final gasp be blown?
Those mere convulsive scratches find the bone
—Who bade him bloody the spent osprey's nare?
The carrochs halted in the public square.
Pennons of every blazon once a-flaunt,
Men prattled, freelier that the crested gaunt
White ostrich with a horse-shoe in her beak
Was missing; whosoever chose might speak

Ecelin boldly out: so, Ecelin
Needed his wife to swallow half the sin
And sickens by himself: the devil's whelp
He styles his son dwindles away, no help
From conserves, your fine triple-curded froth
Of virgin's blood, your Venice viper-broth—
Eh? Jubilate! Tush! no little word
You utter here that's not distinctly heard
At Oliero: he was absent sick
When we besieged Bassano—who i' the thick
O' the work perceived the progress Azzo made
Like Ecelin? through his witch Adelaide
Who managed it so well that night by night
At their bed-foot stood up a soldier-sprite
First fresh, pale by-and-by without a wound,
And when he came with eyes filmed as in swound
They knew the place was taken—Ominous
Your Ghibellin should get what cautelous
Old Redbeard sought from Azzo's sire to wrench
Vainly; St. George contrived his town a trench
O' the marshes, an impermeable bar:
Young Ecelin is meant the tutelar
Of Padua rather; veins embrace upon
His hand like Brenta and Bacchiglion . . .

What now? The founts! God's bread, touch not a plank!
A crawling hell of carrion—every tank
Choke full! found out just now to Cino's cost—
The same who gave Taurello's side for lost,
And, making no account of fortune's freaks,
Refused to budge from Padua then, but sneaks
Back now with Concorezzi—'faith! they drag
Their carroch to San Vital, plant the flag
On his own Palace so adroitly razed
He knew it not; a sort of Guelf folk gazed
And laughed apart; Cino disliked their air—
Must pluck up spirit, show he does not care—
Seats himself on the tank's edge—will begin
To hum, *za za*, *Cavaler Ecelin*—
A silence; he gets warmer, clinks to chime,
Now both feet plough the ground, deeper each time,
At last, *za za*, and up with a fierce kick
Comes his own mother's face caught by the thick
Grey hair about his spur!
Which means, they lift
The covering Taurello made a shift
To stretch upon the truth; as well avoid
Further disclosures; leave them thus employed.
Our dropping Autumn morning clears apace,
And poor Ferrara puts a softened face

On her misfortunes, save one spot—this tall
Huge foursquare line of red brick garden-wall
Bastioned within by trees of every sort
On three sides, slender, spreading, long and short,
(Each grew as it contrived, the poplar ramped,
The fig-tree reared itself,) but stark and cramped,
Made fools of; whence upon the very edge,
Running 'twixt trunk and trunk to smooth one ledge
Of shade, are shrubs inserted, warp and woof,
Which smother up that variance. Scale the roof
Of solid tops and o'er the slope you slide
Down to a grassy space level and wide,
Here and there dotted with a tree, but trees
Of rarer leaf, each foreigner at ease,
Set by itself; and in the centre spreads,
Born upon three uneasy leopards' heads,
A laver, broad and shallow, one bright spirt
Of water bubbles in: the walls begirt
With trees leave off on either hand: pursue
Your path along a wondrous avenue
The walls abut on, heaped of gleamy stone,
With aloes leering everywhere, grey-grown
From many a Moorish summer; how they wind
Out of the fissures! likelier to bind

The building than those rusted cramps which drop
Already in the eating sunshine. Stop
Yon fleeting shapes above there! Ah, the pride
Or else despair of the whole country-side—
A range of statues, swarming o'er with wasps,
God, goddess, woman, man, your Greek rough-rasps
In crumbling Naples marble! meant to look
Like those Messina marbles Constance took
Delight in, or Taurello's self conveyed
To Mantua for his mistress, Adelaide,
A certain font with caryatides
Since cloistered at Goito; only, these
Are up and doing, not abashed, a troop
Able to right themselves—who see you, stoop
O' the instant after you their arms! unplucked
By this or that you pass, for they conduct
To terrace raised on terrace, and, between,
Creatures of brighter mould and braver mien
Than any yet, the choicest of the Isle
No doubt; here, left a sullen breathing-while,
Up-gathered on himself the Fighter stood
For his last fight, and, wiping treacherous blood
Out of the eyelids just held ope beneath
Those shading fingers in their iron sheath,

Steadied his strengths amid the buz and stir
Of a dusk hideous amphitheatre
At the announcement of his over-match
To wind the day's diversion up, despatch
Their pertinacious friend: while, limbs one heap,
The Slave, no breath in her round mouth, watched leap
Dart after dart forth as her hero's car
Clove dizzily the solid of the war
—Let coil about his knees for pride in him.
We reach the farthest terrace and the grim
San Pietro Palace stops us.

Such the state
Of Salinguerra's plan to emulate
Sicilian marvels that his girlish wife
Retrude still might lead her ancient life
In her new home—whereat enlarged so much
Neighbours upon the novel princely touch
He took who here imprisons Boniface.
Here must the Envoys come to sue for grace;
And here, emerging from the labyrinth
Below, two minstrels pause beside the plinth
Of the door-pillar.

One had really left
Verona for the cornfields (a poor theft

From the morass) where Este's camp was made,
The Envoys' march, the Legate's cavalcade—
Looked cursorily o'er, but scarce as when,
Eager for cause to stand aloof from men
At every point save the fantastic tie
Acknowledged in his boyish sophistry,
He made account of such. A crowd; he meant
To task the whole of it; each part's intent
Concerned him therefore, and the more he pried
The less became Sordello satisfied
With his own figure at the moment. Sought
He respite from his task? descried he aught
Novel in the anticipated sight
Of all those livers upon all delight?
A phalanx as of myriad points combined
Whereby he still had imaged that mankind
His youth was passed in dreams of rivalling,
His age—in plans to show at least the thing
So dreamed, but now he hastened to impress
With his own will, effect a happiness
From theirs, supply a body to his soul
Thence, and become eventually whole
With them as he had hoped to be without—
Made these the mankind he was mad about?

Because a few of them were notable
Must all be figured worthy note? As well
Expect to find Taurello's triple line
Of trees a single and prodigious pine.
Real pines rose here and there, but, close among,
Thrust into and mixed up with pines, a throng
Of shrubs you saw, a nameless common sort
O'erpast in dreams, left out of the report,
Fast hurried into corners, or at best
Admitted to be fancied like the rest.
Reckon that morning's proper chiefs; how few!
And yet the people grew, the people grew,
Grew ever, as with many there indeed,
More left behind and most who should succeed,
Simply in virtue of their faces, eyes,
Petty enjoyments and huge miseries,
Were veritably mingled with, made great
Those chiefs: no overlooking Mainard's state
Nor Concorezzi's station, but instead
Of stopping there, each dwindled to be head
Of infinite and absent Tyrolese
Or Paduans; startling too the more that these
Seemed passive and disposed of, uncared for,
Yet doubtless on the whole (quoth Eglamor)

Smiling—for if a wealthy man decays
And out of store of such must wear all days
One tattered suit alike in sun and shade,
'Tis commonly some tarnished fine brocade
Fit for a feast-night's flourish and no more;
Nor otherwise poor Misery from her store
Of looks is fain upgather, keep unfurled
For common wear as she goes through the world
The faint remainder of some worn-out smile
Meant for a feast-night's service merely. While
Crowd upon crowd rose on Sordello thus,—
Crowds no way interfering to discuss
Much less dispute life's joys with one employed
In envying them, or, if they enjoyed,
There lingered somewhat indefinable
In every look and tone, the mirth as well
As woe, that fixed at once his estimate
Of the result, their good or bad estate,—
Old memories flocked but with a new effect:
And the new body, ere he could suspect,
Cohered, mankind and he were really fused,
The new self seemed impatient to be used
By him, but utterly another way
To that anticipated: strange to say,

They were too much below him, more in thrall
Than he, the adjunct than the principal.
What booted scattered brilliances? the mind
Of any number he might hope to bind
And stamp with his own thought, howe'er august,
If all the rest should grovel in the dust?
No: first a mighty equilibrium sure
To be established, privilege procure
For them himself had long possessed! he felt
An error, an exceeding error melt—
While he was occupied with Mantuan chants
Behoved him think of men and of their wants
Such as he now distinguished every side,
As his own want that might be satisfied,
And, after that, of wondrous qualities
Of his own soul demanding exercise,
And like demand it longer: nor a claim
On their part, nor was virtue in the aim
At serving them on his, but, past retrieve,
He in their toils felt with them, nor could leave,
Wonder that in the eagerness to rule,
Impress his will upon them, he the fool
Had never entertained the obvious thought
This last of his arrangements would be fraught

With good to them as well, and he should be
Rejoiced thereat; and if, as formerly,
He sighed the merry time of life must fleet,
'Twas deeplier now, for could the crowds repeat
Their poor experiences? His hand that shook
Was twice to be deplored. The Legate, look!
With eyes, like fresh-blown thrush-eggs on a thread,
Faint-blue and loosely floating in his head,
Large tongue, moist open mouth; and this long while
That owner of the idiotic smile
Serves them! He fortunately saw in time
His fault however, and the office prime
Includes the secondary—best accept
Both offices; Taurello its adept
Could teach him the preparatory one,
And how to do what he had fancied done
Long previously, ere take the greater task.
How render then these people happy? ask
The people's friends: for there must be one good,
One way to it—the Cause! he understood
The meaning now of Palma; else why are
The great ado, the trouble wide and far,
These Guelfs and Ghibellins, the Lombard's hope
Or its despair! 'twixt Emperor or Pope

The confused shifting sort of Eden tale—
Of hardihood recurring still to fail—
That foreign interloping fiend, this free
And native overbrooding Deity—
Yet a dire fascination o'er the palms
His presence ruined troubling thorough calms
Of Paradise—or, on the other hand,
The Pontiff, as your Kaisers understand,
That, snake-like cursed of God to love the ground,
With lulling eye breaks in the noon profound
Some saving tree—who but the Kaiser drest
As the dislodging angel of the pest
Then? yet that pest bedropt, flat head, full fold,
With coruscating dower of dyes; behold
The secret, so to speak, and master-spring
Of the whole contest! which of them shall bring
Men good—perchance the most good—ay, it may
Be that; the question is which knows the way.
And hereupon Count Mainard strutted past
Out of San Pietro; never looked the last
Of archers, slingers; and our friend began
To recollect strange modes of serving man—
Arbalist, catapult, brake, manganel,
And more: this way of theirs may, who can tell,

Need perfecting, said he: all's better solved
At once: Taurello 'twas the task devolved
On late—confront Taurello!
And at last
They did confront him. Scarcely an hour past
When forth Sordello came, older by years
Than at his entry. Unexampled fears
Oppressed him, and he staggered off, blind, mute
And deaf, like some fresh-mutilated brute,
Into Ferrara—not the empty town
That morning witnessed: he went up and down
Streets whence the veil was stripped shred after shred,
So that in place of huddling with their dead
Indoors to answer Salinguerra's ends,
Its folk made shift to crawl and sit like friends
With any one. A woman gave him choice
Of her two daughters, the infantile voice
Or dimpled knee, for half a chain his throat
Was clasped with; but an archer knew the coat—
Its blue cross and eight lilies, bade beware
One dogging him in concert with the pair
Though thrumming on the sleeve that hid his knife.
Night set in early, autumn dews fell rife,
And fires were kindled while the Leaguer's mass
Began at every carroch—he must pass

Between that kneeling people: presently
The carroch of Verona caught his eye
With purple trappings; silently he bent
Over its fire, when voices violent
Began, Affirm not whom the youth was like
That, striking from the porch, I did not strike
Again; I too have chesnut hair; my kin
Hate Azzo and stand up for Ecelin;
Here, minstrel, drive bad thoughts away; sing; take
My glove for guerdon! and for that man's sake
He turned: A song of Eglamor's! scarce named,
When, Our Sordello's, rather! all exclaimed;
Is not Sordello famousest for rhyme?
He had been happy to deny, this time;
Profess as heretofore the aching head,
The failing heart; suspect that in his stead
Some true Apollo had the charge of them,
Was champion to reward or to condemn
So his intolerable risk might shift
Or share itself; but Naddo's precious gift
Of gifts returned, be certain! at the close—
I made that, said he to a youth who rose
As if to hear: 'twas Palma through the band
Conducted him in silence by the hand.

Back now for Salinguerra. Tito of Trent
Gave place, remember, to the pair; who went
In turn at Montelungo's visit—one
After the other are they come and gone.
A drear vast presence-chamber roughly set
In order for this morning's use; you met
The grim black twy-necked eagle, coarsely blacked
With ochre on the naked walls, nor lacked
There green and yellow tokens either side;
But the new symbol Tito brought had tried
The Legate's patience—nay, if Palma knew
What Salinguerra almost meant to do
Until the sight of her restored his lip
A certain half-smile three months' chieftainship
Had banished? Afterward the Legate found
No change in him, nor asked what badge he wound
And unwound carelessly! Now sate the Chief
Silent as when our couple left whose brief
Encounter wrought so opportune effect
In thoughts he summoned not, nor would reject—
Though time, if ever, 'twas to pause now—fix
On any sort of ending: wiles and tricks
Exhausted, judge! his charge, the crazy town,
Just managed to be hindered crashing down—

His last sound troops ranged—care observed to post
His last of the maimed soldiers innermost—
So much was plain enough, but somehow struck
Him not before: and now with this strange luck
Of Tito's news, rewarding his address
So well, what thought he of? How the success
With Friedrich's rescript there would either hush
Ecelin's fiercest scruple up, or flush
Young Ecelin's white cheek, or, last, exempt
Himself from telling what there was to tempt?
No: that this minstrel was Romano's last
Servant—himself the first! Could he contrast
The whole! that minstrel's thirty autumns spent
In doing nought, his notablest event
This morning's journey hither, as we told—
Who yet was lean, outworn and really old,
A stammering awkward youth (scarce dared he raise
His eye before that magisterial gaze)
—And Salinguerra with his fears and hopes
Of sixty years, his Emperors and Popes,
Cares and contrivances, yet you would say
A youth 'twas nonchalantly looked away
Through the embrasure northward o'er the sick
Expostulating trees—so agile quick

And graceful turned the head on the broad chest
Encased in pliant steel, his constant vest,
Whence split thesun off in a spray of fire
Across the room ; and, loosened of its tire
Of steel, that head let see the comely brown
Large massive locks discoloured as a crown
Encircled them, so frayed the basnet where
A sharp white line divided clean the hair ;
Glossy above, glossy below, it swept
Curling and fine about a brow thus kept
Calm, laid coat upon coat, marble and sound :
This was the mystic mark the Tuscan found,
Mused of, turned over books about. Square-faced,
No lion more ; two vivid eyes, enchased
In hollows filled with many a shade and streak
Settling from the bold nose and bearded cheek ;
Nor might the half-smile reach them that deformed
A lip supremely perfect else—unwarmed,
Unwidened, less or more ; indifferent
Whether on trees or men his thoughts were bent—
Thoughts rarely, after all, in trim and train
As now : a period was fulfilled again ;
Such in a series made his life, compressed
In each, one story serving for the rest—

Therefore he smiled. Beyond stretched garden-grounds
Where late the adversary, breaking bounds,
Procured him an occasion That above,
That eagle, testified he could improve
Effectually; the Kaiser's symbol lay
Beside his rescript, a new badge by way
Of baldric; while another thing that marred
Alike emprize, achievement and reward,
Ecelin's missive was conspicuous too.
What a past life those flying thoughts pursue!
As his no name in Mantua half so old;
But at Ferrara, where his sires enrolled
It latterly, the Adelardi spared
Few means to rival them: both factions shared
Ferrara, so that, counted out, 't would yield
A product very like the city's shield,
Half black and white, or Ghibelin and Guelf,
As after Salinguerra styled himself
And Este who, till Marchesalla died
—Last of the Adelardi, never tried
His fortune there; but Marchesalla's child
Transmits (can Blacks and Whites be reconciled
And young Taurello wed Linguetta) wealth
And sway to a sole grasp: each treats by stealth

Already : when the Guelfs, the Ravennese
Arrive, assault the Pietro quarter, seize
Linguetta, and are gone ! Our first dismay
Abated somewhat, hurries down to lay
The after indignation Boniface,
No meaner spokesman : Learn the full disgrace
Averted ere you blame us—wont to rate
Your Salinguerra, and sole potentate
That might have been, 'mongst Este's valvassors—
Ay, Azzo's—who, not privy to, abhors
Our step—but we were zealous. Azzo 's then
To do with ! Straight a meeting of old men :
The Lombard Eagle of the azure sphere
With Italy to build in, builds he here ?
This deemed—the other owned upon advice—
A third reflected on the matter twice—
In fine, young Salinguerra's staunchest friends
Talked of the townsmen making him amends,
Gave him a goshawk, and affirmed there was
Rare sport, one morning, over the morass
A mile or so. He sauntered through the plain,
Was restless, fell to thinking, turned again
In time for Azzo's entry with the bride ;
Count Boniface rode smirking at his side ;

There's half Ferrara with her, whispers flew,
And all Ancona! If the stripling knew!
Anon the stripling was in Sicily
Where Heinrich ruled in right of Constance; he
Was gracious nor his guest incapable;
Each understood the other. So it fell,
One Spring, when Azzo, thoroughly at ease,
Had near forgotten what precise degrees
He crept by into such a downy seat,
Over the Count trudged in a special heat
To bid him of God's love dislodge from each
Of Salinguerra's Palaces; a breach
Might yawn else not so readily to shut,
For who was just arrived at Mantua but
The youngster, sword to thigh, tuft upon chin,
With tokens for Celano, Ecelin,
Pistore and the like! Next news: no whit
Do any of Ferrara's domes befit
His wife of Heinrich's very blood: a band
Of foreigners assemble, understand
Garden-constructing, level and surround,
Build up and bury in. A last news crowned
The consternation: since his infant's birth
He only waits they end his wondrous girth

Of trees that link San Pietro with Tomà
To visit us. When, as its Podestà
Regaled him at Vicenza, Este, there
With Boniface beforehand, each aware
Of plots in progress, gave alarm, expelled
A party which abetted him, but yelled
Too hastily. The burning and the flight,
And how Taurello, occupied that night
With Ecelin, lost wife and son, were told:
—Not how he bore the blow, retained his hold,
Got friends safe through, left enemies the worst
O' the fray, and hardly seemed to care at first—
But afterward you heard not constantly
Of Salinguerra's House so sure to be!
Though Azzo simply gained by the event
A shifting of his plagues—this one content
To fall behind the other and estrange,
You will not say, his nature, but so change
That in Romano sought he wife and child,
And for Romano's sake was reconciled
To losing individual life, deep sunk,
A very pollard mortised in a trunk
Which Arabs out of wantonness contrive
Shall dwindle that the alien stock may thrive

Till forth that vine-palm feathers to the root
And red drops moisten them its arid fruit.
Once set on Adelaide, the subtle mate
And wholly at his beck, to emulate
The Churches valiant women deed for deed,
To paragon her namesake, win the meed
Of its Matilda,—and they overbore
The rest of Lombardy—not as before
By an instinctive truculence, but patched
The Kaiser's strategy until it matched
The Pontiff's, sought old ends by novel means:
Only, Romano Salinguerra screens.
Heinrich was somewhat of the tardiest
To comprehend, nor Philip acquiesced
At once in the arrangement; reasoned, plied
His friend with offers of another bride,
A statelier function—fruitlessly: 'tis plain
Taurello's somehow one to let remain
Obscure; and Otho, free to judge of both,
—Ecelin the unready, harsh and loth,
And this more plausible and facile wight
With every point a-sparkle—chose the right,
Admiring how his predecessors harped
On the wrong man: thus, quoth he, wits are warped

By outsides! Carelessly, withal, his life
Suffered its many turns of peace and strife
In many lands—you hardly could surprise
A man who shamed Sordello (recognise)
In this as much beside, that, unconcerned
What qualities are natural or earned,
With no ideal of graces, as they came
He took them, singularly well the same—
Speaking a dozen languages because
Your Greek eludes you, leave the least of flaws
In contracts, while, through Arab lore, deter
Who may the Tuscan, once Jove trined for her,
From Friedrich's path! Friedrich, whose pilgrimage
The same man puts aside, whom he 'll engage
To leave next year John Brienne in the lurch,
And see Bassano for Saint Francis' church
—Profound on Guido the Bolognian's piece
That, if you lend him credit, rivals Greece—
Angels, with aureoles like golden quoits
Pitched home, applauding Ecelin's exploits
In Painimrie. He strung the angelot;
Made rhymes thereto; for prowess, clove he not
Tiso, last siege, from crest to crupper? why
Detail you thus a varied mastery

But that Taurello, ever on the watch
For men, to read their hearts and thereby catch
Their capabilities and purposes,
Displayed himself so far as displayed these:
While our Sordello only cared to know
About men as a means for him to show
Himself, and men were much or little worth
According as they kept in or drew forth
That self; the other's choicest instruments
Surmised him shallow. Meantime malecontents
Dropped off, town after town grew wiser; how
Change the world's face? said people; as 'tis now
It has been, will be ever: very fine
Subjecting things profane to things divine
In talk: this contumacy will fatigue
The vigilance of Este and the League,
Observe! accordingly, their basement sapped,
Azzo and Boniface were soon entrapped
By Ponte Alto, and in one month's space
Slept at Verona: either left a brace
Of sons—so three years after, either's pair
Lost Guglielm and Aldobrand its heir:
Azzo remained and Richard—all the stay
Of Este and St. Boniface, at bay

As 'twere; when either Ecelin grew old
Or his brain altered—not the proper mould
For new appliances—his old palm stock
Endured no influx of strange strengths: he'd rock
As in a drunkenness, or chuckle low
As proud of the completeness of his woe,
Then weep—real tears! Now make some mad
On Este, heedless of the lesson taught [onslaught
So painfully—now cringe, sue peace, but peace
At price of all advantage; therefore cease
The fortunes of Romano! Up at last
Rose Este and Romano sank as fast.
And men remarked this sort of peace and war
Commenced while Salinguerra was afar:
And every friend besought him, but in vain,
To wait his old adherent, call again
Taurello: not he—who had daughters, sons,
Could plot himself, nor needed any one's
Advice. 'Twas Adelaide's remaining staunch
Prevented his destruction root and branch
Forthwith; Goito green above her, gay
He made alliances, gave lands away
To whom it pleased accept them, and withdrew
For ever from the world. Taurello, who

Was summoned to the convent, then refused
A word,—however patient, thus abused,
At Este's mercy through his imbecile
Ally, was fain dismiss the foolish smile,
And a few movements of the happier sort
Changed matters, put himself in men's report
As heretofore; he had to fight, beside,
And that became him ever. So in pride
And flushing of this kind of second youth
He dealt a good-will blow: Este in truth
Was prone—and you remembered, somewhat late,
A laughing old outrageous stifled hate
He bore that Este—how it would outbreak
At times spite of disguise, like an earthquake
In sunny weather—as that noted day
When with his hundred friends he offered slay
Azzo before the Kaiser's face: and how
On Azzo's calm refusal to allow
A liegeman's challenge straight he too was calmed:
His hate, no doubt, would bear to lie embalmed,
Bricked up, the moody Pharaoh, to survive
All intermediate crumblings, be alive
At earth's catastrophe—'twas Este's crash
Not Azzo's he demanded, so no rash

Procedure! Este's true antagonist
Rose out of Ecelin: all voices whist,
Each glance was sharpened, wit predicted. He
'Twas leaned in the embrasure presently,
Amused with his own efforts, now, to trace
With his steel-sheathed forefinger Friedrich's face
I' the dust: and as the trees waved sere, his smile
Deepened, and words expressed its thought erewhile.
  Ay, fairly housed at last, my old compeer?
That we should stick together all the year
I kept Verona!—How old Boniface,
Old Azzo caught us in its market-place,
He by that pillar, I this pillar, each
In mid swing, more than fury of his speech,
Egging our rabble on to disavow
Allegiance to the Marquis—Bacchus, how
They caught us! Ecelin must turn their drudge;
Nor, if released, will Salinguerra grudge
Paying arrears of tribute due long since—
Bacchus! My man, could promise then, nor wince,
The bones-and-muscles! sound of wind and limb,
Spoke he the set excuse I framed for him;
And now he sits me, slavering and mute,
Intent on chafing each starved purple foot

Benumbed past aching with the altar slab—
Will no vein throb there when some monk shall blab
Spitefully to the circle of bald scalps
" Friedrich 's affirmed to be our side the Alps"
—Eh, brother Lactance, brother Anaclet?
Sworn to abjure the world and the world's fret,
God's own now? drop the dormitory bar,
Enfold the scanty grey serge scapular
Twice o'er the cowl to muffle memories out—
So! but the midnight whisper turns a shout,
Eyes wink, mouths open, pulses circulate
In the stone walls: the past, the world you hate
Is with you, ambush, open field—or see
The surging flame—they fire Vicenza—glee!
Follow, let Pilio and Bernardi chafe—
Bring up the Mantuans—through San Biagio—safe!
Ah, the mad people waken? Ah, they writhe
And reach you? if they block the gate—no tithe
Can pass—keep back you Bassanese! the edge,
Use the edge—shear, thrust, hew, melt down the wedge,
Let out the black of those black upturned eyes!
Hell—are they sprinkling fire too? the blood fries
And hisses on your brass gloves as they tear
Those upturned faces choaking with despair.

Brave! Slidder through the reeking gate—how now!
You six had charge of her? And then the vow
Comes, and the foam spirts, hair 's plucked, till one shriek
(I hear it) and you fling—you cannot speak—
Your gold-flowered basnet to a man who haled
The Adelaide he dared scarce view unveiled
This morn, naked across the fire: how crown
The archer that exhausted lays you down
Your infant, smiling at the flame, and dies?
While one, while mine . . .
Bacchus! I think there lies
More than one corpse there (and he paced the room)
—Another cinder somewhere—'twas my doom
Beside, my doom: if Adelaide is dead
I am the same, this Azzo lives instead
Of that to me, and we pull any how
Este into a heap—the matter's now
At the true juncture slipping us so oft;
Ay, Heinrich died and Otho, please you, doffed
His crown at such a juncture: let but hold
Our Friedrich's purpose, let this chain enfold
The neck of . . . who but this same Ecelin?
That must recoil when the best days begin—
Recoil? that's nought; so the recoiler leaves
His name for me to fight with, no one grieves!

But he must interfere, forsooth, unlock
His cloister to become my stumbling-block
Just as of old! Ay, ay, there 'tis again—
The land's inevitable Head—explain
The reverences that subject us! Count
These Ecelins now! not to say as fount,
Originating power of thought, from twelve
That drop i' the trenches they joined hands to delve
Six shall surpass him, but... why, men must twine
Somehow with something! Ecelin 's a fine
Clear name! 'Twere simpler, doubtless, twine with me
At once: our cloistered friend's capacity
Was of a sort! I had to share myself
In fifty portions, like an o'ertasked elf
That's forced illume in fifty points the vast
Rare vapour he 's environed by: at last
My strengths, though sorely frittered, e'en converge
And crown—no, Bacchus, they have yet to urge
The man be crowned!
That aloe, an he durst,
Would climb! just such a bloated sprawler first
I noted in Messina's castle court
The day I came, and Heinrich asked in sport
If I would pledge my faith to win him back
His right in Lombardy; for, once bid pack

Marauders, he continued, in my stead
You rule, Taurello! and upon this head
Laid the silk glove of Constance—I see her
Too, mantled head to foot in miniver,
Retrude following!
I am absolved
From further toil: the empery devolved
On me, 'twas Tito's word: and think, to lay
For once my plan, pursue my plan my way,
Prompt nobody, and render an account
Taurello to Taurello! nay, I mount
To Friedrich—he conceives the post I kept,
Who did true service, able or inept,
Who's worthy guerdon, Ecelin or I:
Me guerdoned, counsel follows; would he vie
With the Pope really? Azzo, Boniface
Compose a right-arm Hohenstauffen's race
Must break ere govern Lombardy; I point
How easy 'twere to twist, once out of joint,
The socket from the bone; my Azzo's stare
Meanwhile! for I, this idle strap to wear,
Shall—fret myself abundantly, what end
To serve? There's left me twenty years to spend
—How better than my old way? Had I one
Who laboured overthrow my work—a son

Hatching with Azzo superb treachery,
To root my pines up and then poison me,
Suppose—'twere worth while frustrate that! Beside
Another life 's ordained me: the world's tide
Rolls, and what hope of parting from the press
Of waves, a single wave through weariness
That's gently led aside, laid upon shore?
My life must be lived out in foam and roar,
No question. Fifty years the province held
Taurello; troubles raised, and troubles quelled,
He in the midst—who leaves this quaint stone place,
Those trees a year or two, then, not a trace
Of him! How obtain hold, fetter men's tongues
Like that Sordello with his foolish songs—
To which, despite our bustle, he is linked?
—Flowers one may teaze, that never seem extinct;
Ay, that patch, surely, green as ever, where
I set Her Moorish lentisk, by the stair,
To overawe the aloes—and we trod
Those flowers, how call you such? into the sod;
A stately foreigner—and worlds of pain
To make it thrive, arrest rough winds—all vain!
It would decline—these would not be destroyed—
And now, where is it—where can you avoid

The flowers? I frighten children twenty years
Longer!—which way, too, Ecelin appears
To thwart me, for his son's besotted youth
Gives promise of the proper tiger-tooth,
They prattle, at Vicenza! Fate, fate, fate,
My fine Taurello! go you, promulgate
Friedrich's decree, and here's shall aggrandise
Young Ecelin—our Prefect's badge! a prize
Too precious, certainly.
How now? Compete
With my old comrade? shuffle from their seat
His children? Paltry dealing! don't I know
Ecelin? now, I think, and years ago!
What 's changed—the weakness? did not I compound
For that, and undertake preserve him sound
Despite it? Say Taurello 's hankering
After the boy's preferment—this play-thing
To carry, Bacchus! And he laughed.
Remark
Why schemes wherein cold-blooded men embark
Prosper, when your enthusiastic sort
Fails: for these last are ever stopping short—
(Much to be done—so little they can do!)
The careless tribe see nothing to pursue

Should they desist; meantime their scheme succeeds.
Thoughts were caprices in the course of deeds
Methodic with Taurello; so he turned,
Enough amused by fancies fairly earned
Of Este's horror-struck submitted neck,
And Boniface completely at his beck,
To his own petty but immediate doubt
If he could pacify the League without
Conceding Richard; just to this was brought
That interval of vain discursive thought!
As, shall I say, some Ethiop, past pursuit
Of all enslavers, dips a shackled foot,
Burnt to the blood, into the drowsy black
Enormous water current, his sole track
To his own tribe again, where he is King;
And laughs because he guesses, numbering
The yellower poison-wattles on the pouch
Of the first lizard wrested from its couch
Under the slime (whose skin, the while, he strips
To cure his nostril with, and festered lips,
And eyeballs bloodshot through the desert blast)
That he has reached its boundary, at last
May breathe;—thinks o'er enchantments of the South
Sovereign to plague his enemies, their mouth

And nails, and hair; but, these enchantments tried
In fancy, puts them soberly aside
For truth, cool projects, a return with friends,
The likelihood of winning wild amends
Ere long; thinks that, takes comfort silently,
And from the river's brink his wrongs and he,
Hugging revenge close to their hearts, are soon
Off-striding for the Mountains of the Moon.
  Midnight: the watcher nodded on his spear,
Since clouds dispersing left a passage clear,
If any meagre and discoloured moon
Should venture forth; and such was peering soon
Above the harassed city—her close lanes
Closer, not half so tapering her fanes,
As though she shrunk into herself to keep
What little life was saved more safely. Heap
By heap the watch-fires mouldered, and beside
The blackest spoke Sordello and replied
Palma with none to listen. 'Tis your Cause—
What makes a Ghibellin? There should be laws—
(Remember how my youth escaped! I trust
To you for manhood, Palma; tell me just
As any child)—laws secretly at work
Explaining this. Assure me good may lurk

Under the bad; my multitude has part
In your designs, their welfare is at heart
With Salinguerra, to their interest
Refer the deeds he dwelt on—so divest
Our conference of much that scared me: why
Affect that heartless tone to Tito? I
Esteemed myself, yes, in my inmost mind
This morn, a recreant to that wide mankind
O'erlooked till now: why boast my spirit's force,
—That force denied its object? why divorce
These, then admire my spirit's flight the same,
As though it bore a burden, which could tame
No pinion, from dead void to living space?
—That orb consigned to chaos and disgrace,
Why vaunt complacently my frantic dance,
Making a feat's facilities enhance
The marvel? But I front Taurello, one
Of happier fate, and what I should have done
He does; the multitude aye paramount
With him, its making progress may account
For his abiding still: when . . . but you heard
His talk with Tito—the excuse preferred
For burning those five hostages—and broached
By way of blind, as you and I approached,
I do believe.

She spoke: then he, My thought
Plainer expressed! All Friedrich's profit—nought
Of these meantime, of conquests to achieve
For them, of wretchednesses to relieve
While profiting that Friedrich. Azzo, too,
Supports a cause: what is it? Guelfs pursue
Their ends by means like yours, or better?
When
The Guelfs were shown alike, men ranged with men,
And deed with deed, blaze, blood, with blood and blaze,
Morn broke: once more, Sordello, meet its gaze
Proudly—the people's charge against thee fails
In every point, while either party quails!
These are the busy ones—be silent thou!
Two parties take the world up, and allow
No third, yet have one principle, subsist
By the same method; whoso shall enlist
With either, ranks with man's inveterate foes.
So there is one less quarrel to compose
'Twixt us: the Guelf 's, the Ghibellin 's to curse—
I have done nothing, but both sides do worse
Than nothing; nay to me, forgotten, reft
Of insight, lapped by trees and flowers, was left
The notion of a service—ha? What lured
Me here, what mighty aim was I assured

Moved Salinguerra? If a Cause remained
Intact, distinct from these, and fate ordained,
For all the past, that Cause for me?
One pressed
Before them here, a watcher, to suggest
The subject for a ballad: he must know
The tale of the dead worthy, long ago
Consul of Rome—that 's long ago for us,
Minstrels and bowmen, idly squabbling thus
In the world's corners—but too late, no doubt,
For the brave time he sought to bring about
—Not know Crescentius Nomentanus? Then
He cast about for terms to tell him, when
Sordello disavowed it, how they used
Whenever their Superior introduced
A novice to the Brotherhood (for I
Was just a brown-sleeve brother, merrily
Appointed too, quoth he, till Innocent
Bade me relinquish, to my small content,
My wife or my brown sleeves) out some one spoke
Ere nocturns of Crescentius, to revoke
The edict issued after his demise
That blotted memory, and effigies,
All out except a floating power, a name
Including, tending to produce the same

Great act. Rome, dead, forgotten, lived at least
Within that man, though to a vulgar priest
And a vile stranger, fit to be a slave
Of Rome's, Pope John, King Otho, fortune gave
The rule there: but Crescentius, haply drest
In white, called Roman Consul for a jest,
Taking the people at their word, forth stept
As upon Brutus' heel, nor ever kept
Us waiting; stept he forth and from his brain
Gave Rome out on its ancient place again,
Ay, bade proceed with Brutus' Rome kings styled
Themselves the citizens of, and, beguiled
Thereby, were fain select the lustrous gem
Out of a lapfull, spoil their diadem
—The Senate's cypher was so hard to scratch!
He flashes like a phanal, men too catch
The flame, and Rome's accomplished; when returned
Otho and John the Consul's step had spurned,
With Hugo Lord of Este, to redress
The wrongs of each. Crescentius in the stress
Of adverse fortune bent. They crucified
Their Consul in the Forum and abide
Such slaves at Rome e'er since, that I—(for I
Was once a brown-sleeve brother, merrily

Appointed)—I had option to keep wife
Or keep brown sleeves, and managed in the strife
Lose both. A song of Rome!
And Rome, indeed,
Robed at Goito in fantastic weed,
The Mother-City of those Mantuan days,
Looked an established point of light whence rays
Traversed the world; and all the clustered homes
Beside of men were bent on being Romes
In their degree; the question was how each
Should most resemble Rome, clean out of reach
Herself; nor struggled either principle
To change what it aspired possess—Rome, still
For Friedrich or Honorius.
Rome 's the Cause!
The Rome of the old Pandects, our new laws—
The Capitol turned Castle Angelo
And structures that inordinately glow
Corrected by the Theatre forlorn
As a black mundane shell, its world late born
—Verona, that 's beside it. These combined,
We typify the scheme to put mankind
Once more in full possession of their rights
By his sole agency. On me it lights

To build up Rome again—me, first and last :
For such a Future was endured the Past !
And thus in the grey twilight forth he sprung
To give his thought consistency among
The People's self, and let their truth avail
Finish the dream grown from the archer's tale.

BOOK THE FIFTH.

Is it the same Sordello in the dusk
As at the dawn? merely a perished husk
Now, that arose a power like to build
Up Rome again? The proud conception chilled
So soon? Ay, watch that latest dream of thine
—A Rome indebted to no Palatine,
Drop arch by arch, Sordello! Art possest
Of thy wish now—rewarded for thy quest
To-day among Ferrara's squalid sons—
Are this and this and this the shining ones
Meet for the Shining City? Sooth to say
Our favoured tenantry pursue their way
After a fashion! This companion slips
On the smooth causey, t'other blinkard trips
At his mooned sandal. Leave to lead the brawls
Here i' the atria? No, friend. He that sprawls

On aught but a stibadium suffers . . . goose,
Puttest our lustral vase to such an use?
Oh, huddle up the day's disasters—march
Ye runagates, and drop thou, arch by arch,
Rome!
Yet before they quite disband—a whim—
Study a shelter, now, for him, and him,
Nay, even him, to house them! any cave
Suffices—throw out earth. A loophole? Brave!
They ask to feel the sun shine, see the grass
Grow, hear the larks sing? Dead art thou, alas,
And I am dead! But here's our son excels
At hurdle-weaving any Scythian, fells
Oak and devises rafters, dreams and shapes
That dream into a door-post, just escapes
The mystery of hinges. Lie we both
Perdue another age. The goodly growth
Of brick and stone! Our building-pelt was rough,
But that descendant's garb suits well enough
A portico-contriver. Speed the years—
What 's time to us? and lo, a city rears
Itself! nay, enter—what's the grave to us?
So our forlorn acquaintance carry thus
A head! successively sewer, forum, cirque—
Last age that aqueduct was counted work,

And now they tire the artificer upon
Blank alabaster, black obsidion,
—Careful Jove's face be duly fulgurant,
And mother Venus' kiss-creased nipples pant
Back into pristine pulpiness, ere fixed
Above the baths. What difference betwixt
This Rome and ours? Resemblance what between
The scurvy dumb-show and the pageant sheen—
These Romans and our rabble? Rest thy wit
And listen: step by step,—a workman fit
With each, nor too fit,—to one's task, one's time,—
No leaping o'er the petty to the prime,
When just the substituting osier lithe
For bulrushes, and after, wood for withe
To further loam and roughcast work a stage,
Exacts an architect, exacts an age,—
Nor tables of the Mauritanian tree
For men whose maple-log 's their luxury,—
And Rome's accomplished! Better (say you) merge
At once all workmen in the demiurge,
All epochs in a life-time, and all tasks
In one: undoubtedly the city basks
I' the day—while those you'd feast there want the knack
Of keeping fresh-chalked gowns from speck and brack,

Distinguish not your peacock from your swan,
Or Mareotic juice from Cœcuban,
Nay sneer . . . enough ! 'twas happy to conceive
Rome on a sudden, nor shall fate bereave
Us of that credit : for the rest, her spite
Is an old story—serves us very right
For adding yet another to the dull
List of devices—things proved beautiful
Could they be done, Sordello cannot do.
He sate upon the terrace, plucked and threw
The powdery aloe-cusps away, saw shift
Rome's walls, and drop arch after arch, and drift
Mist-like afar those pillars of all stripe,
Mounds of all majesty. Thou archetype,
Last of my dreams and loveliest, depart !
And then a low voice wound into his heart :
Sordello (lower than a Pythoness
Conceding to a Lydian King's distress
The cause of his long error—one mistake
Of her past oracle) Sordello, wake !
Where is the vanity ? Why count you, one
The first step with the last step ? What is gone
Except that aëry magnificence—
That last step you took first ? an evidence

You were . . . no matter. Let those glances fall!
This basis, this beginning step of all,
Which proves you one of us, is this gone too?
Pity to disconcert one versed as you
In fate's ill-nature, but its full extent
Eludes Sordello, even: the veil 's rent,
Read the black writing—that collective man
Outstrips the individual! Who began
The greatnesses you know?—ay, your own art
Shall serve us: put the poet's mimes apart—
Close with the poet—closer—what? a dim
Too plain form separates itself from him?
Alcama's song enmeshes the lulled Isle,
Woven into the echoes left erewhile
Of Nina's, one soft web of song: no more
Turning his name, now, flower-like o'er and o'er!
An elder poet 's in the younger's place—
Take Nina's strength—but lose Alcama's grace?
Each neutralizes each then! gaze your fill;
Search further and the past presents you still
New Ninas, new Alcamas, time's mid-night
Concluding,—better say its evenlight
Of yesterday. You, now, in this respect
Of benefitting people (to reject

The favour of your fearful ignorance
A thousand phantasms eager to advance,
Refer you but to those within your reach)
Were you the first who got, to use plain speech,
The Multitude to be materialized?
That loose eternal unrest—who devised
An apparition i' the midst? the rout
Who checked, the breathless ring who formed about
That sudden flower? Get round at any risk
The gold-rough pointel, silver-blazing disk
O' the lily! Swords across it! Reign thy reign
And serve thy frolic service, Charlemagne!
—The very child of over-joyousness,
Unfeeling thence, strong therefore: Strength by stress
Of Strength comes of a forehead confident,
Two widened eyes expecting heart's content,
A calm as out of just-quelled noise, nor swerves
The ample cheek for doubt, in gracious curves
Abutting on the upthrust nether lip—
He wills, how should he doubt then? Ages slip—
Was it Sordello pried into the work
So far accomplished, and discovering lurk
A company amid the other clans,
Only distinct in priests for castellans

And popes for suzerains (their rule confessed
Its rule, their interest its interest,
Living for sake of living—there an end,
Wrapt in itself, no energy to spend
In making adversaries or allies);
Dived he into its capabilities
And dared create out of that sect a soul
Should turn the multitude, already whole,
To some account? Speak plainer! Is't so sure
God's church lives by a King's investiture?
Look to last step: a staggering—a shock—
What 's sand shall be demolished, but the rock
Endures—a column of black fiery dust
Blots heaven—woe, woe, 'tis prematurely thrust
Aside, that step!—the air clears—nought's erased
Of the true outline? Thus much is firm based—
The other was a scaffold: see you stand
Buttressed upon his mattock Hildebrand
Of the huge brain-mask welded ply o'er ply
As in a forge; it buries either eye
White and extinct, that stupid brow; teeth clenched,
The neck 's tight-corded, too, the chin deep-trenched,
As if a cloud enveloped him while fought
Under it all, grim prizers, thought with thought

At dead-lock, agonizing he, until
The victor thought leap radiant up, and Will,
The slave with folded arms and drooping lids
They fought for, lean forth flame-like as it bids.
—A root, the crippled mandrake of the earth,
Thwarted and dwarfed and blasted in its birth,
Be certain; fruit of suffering's excess,
Whence feeling, therefore stronger: still by stress
Of Strength, work Knowledge! Full three hundred years
For men to wear away in smiles and tears
Between the two that nearly seem to touch,
Observe you: quit one workman and we clutch
Another, letting both their trains go by—
The actors-out of either's policy,
Heinrich, on this hand, Otho, Barbaross,
May carry the Imperial crowns across,
Aix' Iron, Milan's Silver, and Rome's Gold—
As Alexander, Innocent uphold
On that the Papal keys—but, link on link,
Why is it neither chain betrays a chink?
How coalesce the small and great? Alack,
For one thrust forward, fifty such fall back!
The couple there alone help Gregory?
Hark—from the hermit Peter's thin sad cry

At Claremont, yonder to the serf that says
Friedrich 's no liege of his while he delays
Getting the Pope's curse off him! The Crusade—
Or trick of breeding strength by other aid
Than strength, is safe: hark—from the wild harangue
Of Vimmercato, to the carroch's clang
Yonder! The League—or trick of turning strength
Against pernicious strength, is safe at length:
Yet hark—from Mantuan Albert's making cease
The fierce ones, to Saint Francis preaching peace
Yonder! God's Truce—or trick to supersede
The use of strength at all, is safe. Indeed
We trench upon the future! Who shall found
Next step, next age—trail plenteous o'er the ground
Vine-like, produced by joy and sorrow, whence
Unfeeling and yet feeling, strongest thence:
Knowledge by stress of Knowledge is it? No—
E'en were Sordello ready to forego
His work for this, 'twere overleaping work
Some one must do before, howe'er it irk:
No end 's in sight yet of that second road:
Who means to help must still support the load
Hildebrand lifted—why hast Thou, he groaned,
Imposed, my God, a thing thy Paul had moaned,

Thy Moses failed beneath, on me? and yet
That grandest of the tasks God ever set
On man left much to do: a mighty wrench—
The scaffold falls—but half the pillars blench
Merely, start back again—perchance have been
Taken for buttresses: crash every screen,
Hammer the tenons better, and engage
A gang about your work, for the next age
Or two, of Knowledge, part by Strength and part
By Knowledge! then—Ay, then perchance may start
Sordello on his race—but who'll divulge
Time's secrets? lo, a step 's awry, a bulge
To be corrected by a step we thought
Got over long ago—till that is wrought,
No progress! and that scaffold in its turn
Becomes, its service o'er, a thing to spurn.
Meanwhile, your some half-dozen years of life
Longer, dispose you to forego the strife—
Who takes exception? 'Tis Ferrara, mind,
Before us, and Goito 's left behind:
As you then were, as half yourself, desist!
—The warrior-part of you may, an it list,
Finding real faulchions difficult to poise,
Fling them afar and taste the cream of joys

By wielding one in fancy,—what is bard
Of you, may spurn the vehicle that marred
Elys so much, and in mere fancy glut
His sense on her free beauties—we have but
To please ourselves for law, and you could please
What then appeared yourself by dreaming these
Rather than doing these: now—fancy's trade
Is ended, mind, nor one half may evade
The other half: our friends are half of you:
Out of a thousand helps, just one or two
Can be accomplished presently—but flinch
From these (as from the faulchion raised an inch,
Elys described a couplet) and make proof
Of fancy,—and, while one half lolls aloof
O' the grass completing Rome to the tip-top—
See if, for that, the other half will stop
A tear, begin a smile: that rabble's woes,
Ludicrous in their patience as they chose
To sit about their town and quietly
Be slaughtered,—the poor reckless soldiery,
With their ignoble rhymes on Richard, how
Polt-foot, sang they, was in a pitfall now,
Cheering each other from the engine-mounts,—
That crippled spawling idiot who recounts

How, lopt of limbs, he lay, stupid as stone,
Till the pains crept from out him one by one,
And wriggles round the archers on his head
To earn a morsel of their chesnut bread,—
And Cino, always in the self-same place
Weeping; beside that other wretches' case
Eyepits to ear one gangrene since he plied
The engine in his coat of raw sheep's hide
A double watch in the noon sun; and see
Lucchino, beauty, with the favors free,
Trim hacqueton and sprucely scented hair,
Campaigning it for the first time—cut there
In two already, boy enough to crawl
For latter orpine round the Southern wall,
Tomà, where Richard 's kept, because that whore
Marfisa the fool never saw before
Sickened for flowers this wearisomest siege:
Then Tiso's wife—men liked their pretty liege,
Cared for her least of whims once, Berta, wed
A twelvemonth gone, and, now poor Tiso 's dead,
Delivering herself of his first child
On that chance heap of wet filth, reconciled
To fifty gazers. (Here a wind below
Made moody music augural of woe

From the pine barrier)—What if, now the scene
Draws to a shutting, if yourself have been
—You, plucking purples in Goito's moss
Like edges of a trabea (not to cross
Your consul-feeling) or dry aloe-shafts
Here at Ferrara—He whom fortune wafts
This very age her best inheritance
Of opportunities? Yet we advance
Upon the last! Since talking is your trade,
There 's Salinguerra left you to persuade,
And then—
No—no—which latest chance secure!
Leapt up and cried Sordello: this made sure,
The Past is yet redeemable whose work
Was—help the Guelfs, and I, howe'er it irk,
Thus help! He shook the foolish aloe-haulm
Out of his doublet, paused, proceeded calm
To the appointed presence. The large head
Turned on its socket; And your spokesman, said
The large voice, is Elcorte's happy sprout?
Few such (so finishing a speech no doubt
Addressed to Palma, silent at his side)
Our sober councils have diversified:
Elcorte's son!—but forward as you may,
Our lady's minstrel with so much to say!

The hesitating sunset floated back,
Rosily traversed in a single track
The chamber, from the lattice o'er the girth
Of pines to the huge eagle blacked in earth
Opposite, outlined sudden, spur to crest,
That solid Salinguerra, and caressed
Palma's contour; 'twas Day looped back Night's pall;
Sordello had a chance left spite of all.

And much he made of the convincing speech
He meant should compensate the Past and reach
Through his youth's daybreak of unprofit, quite
To his noon's labour, so proceed till night
At leisure! The contrivances to bind
Taurello body with the Cause and mind,
—Was the consummate rhetoric just that?
Yet most Sordello's argument dropped flat
Through his accustomed fault of breaking yoke,
Disjoining him who felt from him who spoke:
Was't not a touching incident—so prompt
A rendering the world its just accompt
Once proved its debtor? Who'd suppose before
This proof that he, Goito's God of yore,
At duty's instance could demean himself
So memorably, dwindle to a Guelf?

Be sure, in such delicious flattery steeped,
His inmost self at the out-portion peeped
Thus occupied; then stole a glance at those
Appealed to, curious if her colour rose
Or his lip moved, while he discreetly urged
The need of Lombardy's becoming purged
At soonest of her barons; the poor part
Abandoned thus missing the blood at heart,
Spirit in brain, unseasonably off
Elsewhere! But, though his speech was worthy scoff,
Good-humoured Salinguerra, famed for tact
That way, who, careless of his phrase, ne'er lacked
The ~~right phrase~~, and harangued Honorius dumb
At his accession, looked as all fell plumb
To purpose and himself took interest
In every point his new instructor pressed
—Left playing with the rescript's white wax seal
To scrutinize Sordello head to heel:
Then means he . . . yes, assent sure? Well? Alas,
He said no more than, So it comes to pass
That poesy, sooner than politics,
Makes fade young hair: to think his speech could fix
Taurello!
Then a flash; he knew the truth:
So fantasies shall break and fritter youth

That he has long ago lost earnestness,
Lost will to work, lost power to express
Even the need of working! Ere the grave
No more occasions now, though he should crave
One such in right of superhuman toil
To do what was undone, repair his spoil,
Alter the Past—nought brings again the chance!
Not that he was to die: he saw askance
Protract the ignominious years beyond
To dream in—time to hope and time despond,
Remember and forget, be sad, rejoice
As saved a trouble, suited to his choice,
—One way or other idle life out, drop
No few smooth verses by the way—for prop
A thyrsus these sad people should, the same,
Pick up, set store by, and, so far from blame,
Plant o'er his hearse convinced his better part
Survived him. Rather tear men out the heart
Of the truth! Sordello muttered, and renewed
His propositions for the Multitude.

But Salinguerra who, the last attack,
Threw himself in his ruffling corslet back
To hear the better, smilingly resumed
Some task; beneath the carroch's warning boomed;

He must decide with Tito; courteously
He turned then, even seeming to agree
With his admonisher—"Assist the Pope,
Extend his domination, fill the scope
Of the Church based on All, by All, for All—
Change Secular to Evangelical"—
Echoing his very sentence: all seemed lost,
When sudden he looked, laughingly almost,
To Palma: This opinion of your friend's
For instance, would it answer Palma's ends?
Best, were it not, turn Guelf, submit our Strength
(Here he drew out his baldric to its length)
To the Pope's Knowledge—letting Richard slip,
Wide to the walls throw ope your gates, equip
Azzo with . . . but no matter! Who 'll subscribe
To a trite censure of the minstrel tribe
Henceforward? or pronounce, as Heinrich used,
"Spear-heads for battle, burr-heads for the joust"
—When Constance, for his couplets, would promote
Alcama from a parti-coloured coat
To holding her lord's stirrup in the wars.
Not that I see where couplet-making jars
With common sense: at Mantua we had borne
This chanted, easier than their most forlorn

Of bull-fights, that's indisputable!

Brave!

Whom vanity nigh slew, contempt shall save!
All's at an end: a Troubadour suppose
Mankind 's to class him with their friends or foes?
A puny uncouth ailing vassal think
The world and him in some especial link?
Abrupt the visionary tether 's burst—
What's to reward or what to be amerced
If a poor drudge, solicitous to dream
Deservingly, gets tangled by his theme
So far as to conceit his knack or gift
Or whatsoe'er it be of verse might lift
The globe, a lever like the hand and head
Of—Men of Action, as the Jongleurs said,
—The Great Men, in the people's dialect?
And not a moment did this scorn affect
Sordello: scorn the poet? They, for once,
Asking "what was," obtained a full response.
Bid Naddo think at Mantua, he had but
To look into his promptuary, put
His hand on a set thought in a set speech:
And was Sordello fitted thus for each
Conjuncture? No wise; since within his soul
Perception brooded unexpressed and whole:

A healthy spirit like a healthy frame
Craves aliment in plenty and, the same,
Changes, assimilates its aliment:
Perceived Sordello, on a truth intent?
Next day no formularies more you saw
Than figs or olives in a sated maw
—'Tis Knowledge whither such perceptions tend,
They lose themselves in that, means to an end,
The Many Old producing some One New,
A Last unlike the First. If lies are true,
The Caliph Haroun's man of brass receives
A meal, ay, millet grains and lettuce leaves
Together in his stomach rattle loose—
You find them perfect next day to produce
But ne'er expect the man, on strength of that,
Can roll an iron camel-collar flat
Like Haroun's self! I tell you, what was stored
Parcel by parcel through his life, outpoured
That eve, was, for that age, a novel thing:
And round those three the People formed a ring,
Suspended their own vengeance, chose await
The issue of this strife to reinstate
Them in the right of taking it—in fact
He must be proved their lord ere they exact

Amends for that lord's defalcation. Last,
A reason why the phrases flowed so fast
Was in his quite forgetting for the time
Himself in his amazement that his rhyme
Disguised the royalty so much: he there—
They full face to him—and yet unaware
Who was the King and who . . . But if I lay
On thine my spirit and compel obey
His lord—Taurello? Impotent to build
Another Rome, but hardly so unskilled
In what such builder should have been as brook
One shame beyond the charge that he forsook
His function! Set me free that shame I bend
A brow before, suppose new years to spend,
Allow each chance, nor fruitlessly, recur—
Measure thee with the Minstrel, then, demur
At any crown he claims! That I must cede
As 'tis, my right to my especial meed—
Confess you fitter help the world than I
Ordained its champion from eternity,
Is much: but to behold you scorn the post
I quit in your behalf—as aught 's to boast
Unless you help the world! And while he rung
The changes on this theme, the roof up-sprung,

The sad walls of the presence-chamber died
Into the distance, or, embowering vied
With far-away Goito's vine-frontier;
And crowds of faces (only keeping clear
The rose-light in the midst, his vantage-ground
To fight their battle from) deep clustered round
Sordello, with good wishes no mere breath,
Kind prayers for him no vapour, since, come death,
Come life, he was fresh-sinewed every joint,
Each bone new-marrowed as whom Gods anoint
Though mortal to their rescue: now let sprawl
The snaky volumes hither, Typhon's all
For Hercules to trample—good report
From Salinguerra 's only to extort?
So was I (closed he his inculcating
A poet must be earth's essential king)
So was I, royal so, and if I fail
'Tis not the royalty ye witness quail
But one deposed who, caring not exert
Its proper essence, trifled malapert
With accidents instead—good things assigned
The herald of a better thing behind—
And, worthy through display of these, put forth
Never the inmost all-surpassing worth

That constitutes him King precisely since
As yet no other creature may evince
Its like: the power he took most pride to test,
Whereby all forms of life had been professed
At pleasure, forms already on the earth,
Was but a means to power whose novel birth
Should, in its novelty, be kingship's proof—
Now, whether he came near or kept aloof,
Those forms unalterable first to last
Proved him her copy, not the protoplast
Of Nature: what could come of being free
By action to exhibit tree for tree,
Bird, beast for beast and bird, or prove earth bore
A veritable man or woman more?
Means to an end, such proofs; and what the end?
Your essence, whatsoe'er it be, extend—
Never contract! Already you include
The multitude; now let the multitude
Include yourself, and the result is new;
Themselves before, the multitude turn you;
This were to live and move and have (in them)
Your being, and secure a diadem
That 's to transmit (because no cycle yearns
Beyond itself, but on itself returns)

When the full sphere in wane, the world o'erlaid
Long since with you, shall have in turn obeyed
Some orb still prouder, some displayer, still
More potent than the last, of human Will,
And some new King depose the old. Of such
Am I—whom pride of this elates too much?
Safe, rather say, mid troops of peers again;
I, with my words, hailed brother of the train
Once deeds sufficed: for, let the world roll back,
Who fails, through deeds diverse so e'er, re-track
My purpose still, my task? A teeming crust—
Air, flame, earth, wave at conflict—see! Needs must
Emerge some Calm embodied these refer
(Saturn—no yellow-bearded Jupiter!)
The brawl to; some existence like a pact
And protest against Chaos, some first fact
I' the faint of Time . . . my deep of life, I know,
Is unavailing e'en to poorly show
(For here the Chief immeasurably yawned)
Deeds in their due gradation till Song dawned—
The fullest effluence of the finest mind
All in degree, no way diverse in kind
From those about us, minds which, more or less,
Lofty or low, in moving seek impress

Themselves on somewhat; but one mind has climbed
Step after step, by just ascent sublimed:
Thought is the soul of act, and stage by stage,
Is soul from body still to disengage
As tending to a freedom which rejects
Such help and incorporeally affects
The world, producing deeds but not by deeds,
Swaying, in others, frames itself exceeds,
Assigning them the simpler tasks it used
As patiently perform till Song produced
Acts, by thoughts only, for the mind: divest
Mind of e'en Thought, and, lo, God's unexpressed
Will dawns above us. But so much to win
Ere that! A lesser round of steps within
The last. About me, faces! and they flock,
The earnest faces! What shall I unlock
By song? behold me prompt, whate'er it be,
To minister: how much can mortals see
Of Life? No more? I covet the first task
And marshal yon Life's elemental Masque
Of Men, on evil or on good lay stress,
This light, this shade make prominent, suppress
All ordinary hues that softening blend
Such natures with the level: apprehend

Which evil is, which good, if I allot
Your Hell, the Purgatory, Heaven ye wot,
To those you doubt concerning: I enwomb
Some wretched Friedrich with his red-hot tomb,
Some dubious spirit, Lombard Agilulph
With the black chastening river I engulph;
Some unapproached Matilda I enshrine
With languors of the planet of decline—
These fail to recognise, to arbitrate
Between henceforth, to rightly estimate
Thus marshalled in the Masque! Myself, the while,
As one of you, am witness, shrink or smile
At my own showing! Next age—what's to do?
The men and women stationed hitherto
Will I unstation, good and bad, conduct
Each nature to its farthest or obstruct
At soonest in the world: Light, thwarted, breaks
A limpid purity to rainbow flakes,
Or Shadow, helped, freezes to gloom: behold
How such, with fit assistance to unfold,
Or obstacles to crush them, disengage
Their forms, love, hate, hope, fear, peace make, war
In presence of you all! Myself implied [wage,
Superior now, as, by the platform's side,

Bidding them do and suffer to content
The world . . . no—that I wait not—circumvent
A few it has contented, and to these
Offer unveil the last of mysteries
I boast! Man's life shall have yet freer play:
Once more I cast external things away
And Natures, varied now, so decompose
That . . . but enough! Why fancy how I rose,
Or rather you advanced since evermore
Yourselves effect what I was fain before
Effect, what I supplied yourselves suggest,
What I leave bare yourselves can now invest?
How we attained to talk as brothers talk,
In half-words, call things by half-names, no balk
From discontinuing old aids—To-day
Takes in account the work of Yesterday—
Has not the world a Past now, its adept
Consults ere he dispense with or accept
New aids? a single touch more may enhance,
A touch less turn to insignificance
Those structures' symmetry the Past has strewed
Your world with, once so bare: leave the mere rude
Explicit details, 'tis but brother's speech
We need, speech where an accent's change gives each

The other's soul—no speech to understand
By former audience—need was then expand,
Expatiate—hardly were they brothers! true—
Nor I lament my less remove from you,
Nor reconstruct what stands already: ends
Accomplished turn to means: my art intends
New structure from the ancient: as they changed
The spoils of every clime at Venice, ranged
The horned and snouted Lybian God, upright
As in his desert, by some simple bright
Clay cinerary pitcher—Thebes as Rome,
Athens as Byzant rifled, till their Dome
From Earth's reputed consummations razed
A seal the all-transmuting Triad blazed
Above. Ah, whose that fortune? ne'ertheless
E'en he must stoop contented to express
No tithe of what's to say—the vehicle
Never sufficient—but his work is still
For faces like the faces that select
A single service I am bound effect
Nor murmur, bid me, still as poet, bow
Taurello to the Guelf cause, disallow
The Kaiser's coming—which with heart, soul, strength,
I labour for, this eve, who feel at length

My past career's outrageous vanity
And would (as vain amends) die, even die
Now I first estimate the boon of life,
So death might bow Taurello—sure this strife
Is the last strife—the People my support.
  My poor Sordello! what may we extort
By this, I wonder? Palma's lighted eyes
Turned to Taurello who, as past surprise,
Began, You love him—what you'd say at large
If I say briefly? First your father's charge
To me, his friend, peruse: I guessed indeed
You were no stranger to the course decreed
Us both: I leave his children to the saints:
As for a certain project, he acquaints
The Pope with that, and offers him the best
Of your possessions to permit the rest
Go peaceably—to Ecelin, a stripe
Of soil the cursed Vicentines will gripe,
—To Alberic, a patch the Trevisan
Clutches already; extricate who can
Treville, Villarazzi, Puissolo,
Cartiglione, Loria—all go,
And with them go my hopes! 'Tis lost, then! Lost
This eve, our crisis, and some pains it cost

Procuring ; thirty years—as good I'd spent
Like our admonisher ! But each his bent
Pursues—no question, one might live absurd
Oneself this while, by deed as he by word,
Persisting to obtrude an influence where
'Tis made account of much as . . . nay, you fare
With twice the fortune, youngster—I submit,
Happy to parallel my waste of wit
With the renowned Sordello's—you decide
A course for me—Romano may abide
Romano,—Bacchus ! Who'd suppose the dearth
Of Ecelins and Alberics on earth ?
Say there's a thing in prospect, must disgrace
Betide competitors ? An obscure place
Suits me—there wants youth, bustle, one to stalk
And attitudinize—some fight, more talk,
Most flaunting badges—'twere not hard make clear
Since Friedrich's very purposes lie here
—Here—pity they are like to lie ! For me,
Whose station's fixed unceremoniously
Long since, small use contesting ; I am but
The liegeman, you are born the lieges—shut
That gentle mouth now !—or resume your kin
In your sweet self ; Palma were Ecelin

For me and welcome! Could that neck endure
This bauble for a cumbrous garniture
You should . . . or might one bear it for you? Stay—
I have not been so flattered many a day
As by your pale friend—Bacchus! The least help
Would lick the hind's fawn to a lion's whelp—
His neck is broad enough—a ready tongue
Beside—too writhled—but, the main thing, young—
I could . . . why look ye!
And the badge was thrown
Across Sordello's neck: this badge alone
Makes you Romano's Head—the Lombard's Curb
Turns on your neck which would, on mine, disturb
My pauldron, said Taurello. A mad act,
Nor dreamed about a moment since—in fact
Not when his sportive arm rose for the nonce—
But he had dallied overmuch, this once,
With power: the thing was done, and he, aware
The thing was done, proceeded to declare
(So like a nature made to serve, excel
In serving, only feel by service well)
That he should make him all he said and more:
As good a scheme as any: what's to pore
At in my face? he asked—ponder instead
This piece of news; you are Romano's Head—

One cannot slacken pace so near the goal,
Suffer my Azzo to escape heart-whole
This time! For you there's Palma to espouse—
For me, one crowning trouble ere I house
Like my compeer.
On which ensued a strange
And solemn visitation—mighty change
O'er every one of them—each looked on each—
Up in the midst a truth grew, without speech,
And when the giddiness sank and the haze
Subsided, they were sitting, no amaze,
Sordello with the baldric on, his sire
Silent though his proportions seemed aspire
Momently; and, interpreting the thrill
Nigh at its ebb, Palma you found was still
Relating somewhat Adelaide confessed
A year ago, while dying on her breast,
Of a contrivance that Vicenza night,
Her Ecelin had birth: their convoy's flight
Cut off a moment, coiled inside the flame
That wallowed like a dragon at his game
The toppling city through—San Biagio rocks!
And wounded lies in her delicious locks
Retrude, the frail mother, on her face,
None of her wasted, just in one embrace

Covering her child : when, as they lifted her,
Cleaving the tumult, mighty, mightier
And mightiest Taurello's cry outbroke,
Leapt like a tongue of fire that cleaves the smoke,
Midmost to cheer his Mantuans onward—drown
His colleague's clamour, Ecelin's, up, down
The disarray : failed Adelaide see then
Who was the natural Chief, the Man of Men ?
Outstripping time her Ecelin burst swathe,
Stood up with haggard eyes beyond the scathe
From wandering after his heritage
Lost once and lost for aye—what could engage
That deprecating glance ? A new Shape leant
On a familiar Shape—gloatingly bent
O'er his discomfiture ; 'mid wreaths it wore,
Still one outflamed the rest—her child's before
'Twas Salinguerra's for his child : scorn, hate
Rage, startled her from Ecelin—too late !
A moment's work, and rival's foot had spurned
Never that brow to earth ! Ere sense returned—
The act conceived, adventured, and complete,
They stole away towards an obscure retreat
Mother and child—Retrude's self not slain
(Nor even here Taurello moved) though pain

Was fled; and what assured them most 'twas fled,
All pain, was, if you raised the pale hushed head
'Twould turn this way and that, waver awhile,
And only settle into its old smile
(Graceful as the disquieted water-flag
Steadying itself, remarked they, in the quag
On either side their path) when suffered look
Downward: they marched: no sign of life once shook
The company's close litter of crossed spears
Till, as they reached Goito, a few tears
Slipt in the sunset from her long black lash,
And she was gone. So far the action rash—
No crime. They laid Retrude in the font
Taurello's very gift, her child was wont
To sit beneath—constant as eve he came
To sit by its attendant girls the same
As one of them. For Palma, she would blend
With this magific spirit to the end
That ruled her first—but scarcely had she dared
To disobey the Adelaide who scared
Her into vowing never to disclose
A secret to her husband which so froze
His blood at half recital she contrived
To hide from him Taurello's infant lived

Lest, by revealing that, himself should mar
Romano's fortunes: and, a crime so far,
Palma received that action: she was told
Of Salinguerra's nature, and his cold
Calm acquiescence in his lot! But free
Impart the secret to Romano, she
Engaged to repossess Sordello of
His heritage, and hers, and that way doff
The mask, but after years, long years!—while now
Was not Romano's sign-mark on that brow?
  Across Taurello's heart his arms were locked:
And 'twas, when speak he did, as if he mocked
The minstrel, who had not to move, he said,
Not stir—should Fate defraud him of a shred
Of this son's infancy? much less of youth
(Laughingly all this) which to aid, in truth,
Himself, reserved on purpose, had not grown
Old, not too old—'twas better keep alone
Till now, and never idly meet till now:
—Then, in the same breath, told Sordello how
The intimations of this eve's event
Were futile—Friedrich means advance to Trent,
Thence to Verona, then to Rome—there stop—
Tumble the Church down, institute a-top

The Alps a Prefecture of Lombardy:
—That's now—no prophesying what may be
Anon, beneath a monarch of the clime,
Native of Gesi, passing his youth's prime
At Naples. Tito bids my choice decide
On whom . . .
Embrace him, madman! Palma cried
Who through the laugh saw sweatdrops burst apace
And his lips' blanching: he did not embrace
Sordello, but he laid Sordello's hand
On his own eyes, mouth, forehead.
Understand,
This while Sordello was becoming flushed
Out of his whiteness; thoughts rushed, fancies rushed;
He pressed his hand upon his head and signed
Both should forbear him. Nay, the best's behind!
Taurello laughed—not quite with the same laugh:
The truth is, thus you scatter, ay, like chaff
The Guelfs a despicable monk recoils
From—nor expect a fickle Kaiser spoils
Our triumph!—Friedrich? Think you I intend
Friedrich shall reap the fruits of blood I spend
And brain I waste? Think you the people clap
Their hands at my out-hewing this wild gap

For any Friedrich to fill up? 'Tis mine—
That's yours: I tell you towards some such design
Have I worked blindly, yes, and idly, yes,
And for another, yes—but worked no less
With instinct at my heart; I else had swerved,
While now—look round! My cunning has preserved
Samminiato—that's a central place
Secures us Florence, boy, in Pisa's case
By land as she by sea; with Pisa ours,
And Florence, and Pistoia, one devours
The land at leisure! Gloriously dispersed—
Brescia, observe, Milan, Piacenza first
That flanked us (ah, you know not!) in the March;
On these we pile, as keystone of our arch,
Romagna and Bologna, whose first span
Covered the Trentine and the Valsugan;
Sofia's Egna by Bolgiano's sure . . .
So he proceeded. Half of all this pure
Delusion, doubtless, nor the rest too true,
But what was undone he felt sure to do
As ring by ring he wrung off, flung away
The pauldron-rings to give his sword-arm play—
Need of the sword now! That would soon adjust
Aught wrong at present; to the sword intrust

Sordello's whiteness, undersize; 'twas plain
He hardly rendered right to his own brain—
Like a brave hound men educate to pride
Himself on speed or scent nor aught beside,
As though he could not, gift by gift, match men!
Palma had listened patiently: but when
'Twas time expostulate, attempt withdraw
Taurello from his child, she, without awe
Took off his iron arms from, one by one,
Sordello's shrinking shoulders, and, that done,
Made him avert his visage and relieve
Sordello (you might see his corslet heave [sank:
The while) who, loose, rose—tried to speak—then
They left him in the chamber—all was blank.
And even reeling down the castle-stair
Taurello kept up, as though unaware
Palma was guide to him, the old device
—Something of Milan—how we muster thrice
The Torriani's strength there—all along
Our own Visconti cowed them—thus the song
Continued even while she bade him stoop,
Thrid somehow, by some glimpse of arrow-loop,
The turnings to the gallery below,
Where he stopped short as Palma let him go.

When he had sate in silence long enough
Splintering the stone bench, braving a rebuff
She stopt the truncheon; only to commence
One of Sordello's poems, a pretence
For speaking, some poor rhyme of Elys' hair
And head that 's sharp and perfect like a pear,
So smooth and close are laid the few fine locks
Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks
Sun-blanched the livelong Summer—from his worst
Performance, the Goito, as his first:
And that at end, conceiving from the brow
And open mouth no silence would serve now,
Went on to say the whole world loved that man
And, for that matter, thought his face, tho' wan,
Eclipsed the Count's—he sucking in each phrase
As if an angel spoke: the foolish praise
Ended, he drew her on his mailed knees, made
Her face a frame-work with his hands, a shade,
A crown, an aureole—there must she remain
(Her little mouth compressed with smiling pain
As in his gloves she felt her tresses twitch)
To get the best look at, in fittest niche
Dispose his saint; that done, he kissed her brow—
Lauded her father for his treason now,

He told her, only how could one suspect
The wit in him? whose clansman, recollect,
Was ever Salinguerra—she, the same,
Romano and his lady—so might claim
To know all, as she should—and thus begun
Schemes with a vengeance, schemes on schemes, not one
Fit to be told that foolish boy, he said,
But only let Sordello Palma wed,
—Then!
'Twas a dim long narrow place at best:
Midway a sole grate showed the fiery West
As shows its corpse the world's end some split tomb—
A gloom, a rift of fire, another gloom
Faced Palma—but at length Taurello set
Her free; the grating held one ragged jet
Of fierce gold fire: he lifted her within
The hollow underneath—how else begin
Fate's second marvellous cycle, else renew
The ages than with Palma plain in view?
Then paced the passage, hands clenched, head erect,
Pursuing his discourse; a grand unchecked
Monotony made out from his quick talk
And the recurring noises of his walk;

—Somewhat too much like the o'ercharged assent
Of two resolved friends in one danger blent,
Who hearten each the other against heart—
Boasting there 's nought to care for, when, apart
The boaster, all's to care for: he, beside
Some shape not visible, in power and pride
Approached, out of the dark, ginglingly near,
Nearer, passed close in the broad light, his ear
Crimson, eyeballs suffused, temples full-fraught,
Just a snatch of the rapid speech you caught,
And on he strode into the opposite dark
Till presently the harsh heel's turn, a spark
I' the stone, and whirl of some loose embossed thong
That crashed against the angle aye so long
After the last, punctual to an amount
Of mailed great paces you could not but count,
Prepared you for the pacing back again:
And by the snatches might you ascertain
That, Friedrich's Prefecture surmounted, left
By this alone in Italy, they cleft
Asunder, crushed together, at command
Of none, were free to break up Hildebrand,
Rebuild, he and Sordello, Charlemagne—
But garnished, Strength with Knowledge, if we deign

Accept that compromise and stoop to give
Rome law, the Cæsars' Representative.
—Enough that the illimitable flood
Of triumphs after triumphs, understood
In its faint reflux (you shall hear) sufficed
Young Ecelin for appanage, enticed
Him till, these long since quiet in their graves,
He found 'twas looked for that a long life's braves
Should somehow be made good—so, weak and worn,
Must stagger up at Milan, one grey morn
Of the To-Come, to fight his latest fight.
And Salinguerra's prophecy at height—
He voluble with a raised arm and stiff,
A blaring voice, a blazing eye, as if
He had our very Italy to keep
Or cast away, or gather in a heap
To garrison the better—ay, his word
Was, "run the cucumber into a gourd,
Drive Trent upon Apulia"—at their pitch
Who spied the continents and islands which
Grew sickles, mulberry leaflets in the map—
(Strange that three such confessions so should hap
To Palma Dante spoke with in the clear
Amorous silence of the Swooning-sphere.

Cunizza, as he called her! Never ask
Of Palma more! She sate, knowing her task
Was done, the labour of it—for success
Concerned not Palma, passion's votaress)
Triumph at height, I say, Sordello crowned—
Above the passage suddenly a sound
Stops speech, stops walk: back shrinks Taurello, bids
With large involuntary asking lids
Palma interpret. 'Tis his own foot-stamp—
Your hand! His summons! Nay, this idle damp
Befits not. Out they two reeled dizzily:
"Visconti's strong at Milan," resumed he
In the old somewhat insignificant way
(Was Palma wont years afterward to say)
As though the spirit's flight sustained thus far
Dropped at that very instant. Gone they are—
Palma, Taurello; Eglamor anon,
Ecelin, Alberic . . . ah, Naddo's gone!
—Labours this moonrise what the Master meant
"Is Squarcialupo speckled?—purulent
I'd say, but when was Providence put out?
He carries somehow handily about
His spite nor fouls himself!" Goito's vines
Stand like a cheat detected—stark rough lines

The moon breaks through, a grey mean scale against
The vault where, this eve's Maiden, thou remain'st
Like some fresh martyr, eyes fixed—who can tell?
As Heaven, now all's at end, did not so well
Spite of the faith and victory, to leave
Its virgin quite to death in the lone eve:
While the persisting hermit-bee . . . ha! wait
No longer—these in compass, forward fate!

BOOK THE SIXTH.

THE thought of Eglamor 's least like a thought,
And yet a false one, was, Man shrinks to nought
If matched with symbols of immensity—
Must quail, forsooth, before a quiet sky
Or sea, too little for their quietude :
And, truly, somewhat in Sordello's mood
Confirmed its speciousness while evening sank
Down the near terrace to the further bank,
And only one spot left out of the night
Glimmered upon the river opposite—
A breadth of watery heaven like a bay,
A sky-like space of water, ray for ray
And star for star, one richness where they mixed
As this and that wing of an angel, fixed,
Tumultuary splendors folded in
To die : nor turned he till Ferrara's din

(Say, the monotonous speech from a man's lip
Who lets some first and eager purpose slip
In a new fancy's birth; the speech keeps on
Though elsewhere its informing soul be gone)
Aroused him,—surely offered succour; fate
Paused with this eve; ere she precipitate
Herself . . . put off strange after-thoughts awhile,
That voice, those large hands, that portentous smile . . .
What help to pierce the Future as the Past
Lay in the plaining city?
And at last
The main discovery and prime concern,
All that just now imported him to learn,
His truth, like yonder slow moon to complete
Heaven, rose again, and naked at his feet
Lighted his old life's every shift and change,
Effort with counter-effort; nor the range
Of each looked wrong except wherein it checked
Some other—which of these could he suspect
Prying into them by the sudden blaze?
The real way seemed made up of all the ways—
Mood after mood of the one mind in him;
Tokens of the existence, bright or dim,
Of a transcendent all-embracing sense
Demanding only outward influence,

A soul, in Palma's phrase, above his soul,
Power to uplift his power, this moon's control,
Over the sea-depths, and their mass had swept
Onward from the beginning and still kept
Its course; but years and years the sky above
Held none, and so, untasked of any love,
His sensitiveness idled, now amort,
Alive now, and to sullenness or sport
Given wholly up, disposed itself anew
At every passing instigation, grew
And dwindled at caprice, in foam-showers spilt,
Wedge-like insisting, quivered now a gilt
Shield in the sunshine, now a blinding race
Of whitest ripples o'er the reef—found place
For myriad charms; not gathered up and, hurled
Right from its heart, encompassing the world.
So had Sordello been, by consequence,
Without a function: others made pretence
To strengths not half his own, yet had some core
Within, submitted to some moon, before
It still, superior still whate'er its force,
Were able therefore to fulfil a course
Nor missed Life's crown, authentic attribute—
To each who lives must be a certain fruit

Of having lived in his degree, a stage
Earlier or later in men's pilgrimage,
To stop at; and to which those spirits tend
Who, still discovering beauty without end,
Amass the scintillations for one star
—Something unlike them, self-sustained, afar,
And meanwhile nurse the dream of being blest
By winning it to notice and invest
Their souls with alien glory some one day
Whene'er the nucleus, gathering shape alway,
Round to the perfect circle—soon or late
According as themselves are formed to wait;
Whether 'tis human beauty will suffice
—The yellow hair and the luxurious eyes,
Or human intellect seem best, or each
Combine in some ideal form past reach
On earth, or else some shade of these, some aim,
Some love, hate even, take their place the same,
That may be served—all this they do not lose,
Waiting for death to live, nor idly choose
What Hell shall be—a progress thus pursued
Through all existence, still above the food
That 's offered them, still towering beyond
The widened range in virtue of their bond

Of sovereignty: not that a Palma's Love
A Salinguerra's Hate would equal prove
To swaying all Sordello: wherefore doubt,
Love meet for such a Strength, some Moon 's without
To match his Sea?—fear, Good so manifest,
Only the Best breaks faith?—but that the Best
Somehow eludes us ever, still might be
And is not: crave you gems? where 's penury
Of their material round us? pliant earth,
The plastic flame—what balks the Mage his birth
—Jacynth in balls, or lodestone by the block?
Flinders enrich the strand and veins the rock—
No more! Ask creatures? Life in tempest, Thought
Clothes the keen hill-top, mid-day woods are fraught
With fervors . . . ah, these forms are well enough—
But we had hoped, encouraged by the stuff
Profuse at Nature's pleasure, Men beyond
These Men! and thus, perchance, are over-fond
In arguing, from Good the Best, from force
Divided—force combined, an ocean's course
From this our sea whose mere intestine pants
Had seemed at times sufficient to our wants.
—External Power? If none be adequate
And he have been ordained (a prouder fate)

A law to his own sphere? the need remove
All incompleteness be that law, that love?
Nay, really such be other's laws, though veiled
In mercy to each vision that had failed
If unassisted by its Want, for lure,
Embodied? stronger vision could endure
The simple want—no bauble for a truth!
The People were himself; and by the ruth
At their condition was he less impelled
Alter the discrepancy he beheld
Than if, from the sound Whole, a sickly Part
Subtracted were transformed, decked out with art,
Then palmed on him as alien woe—the Guelf
To succour, proud that he forsook himself?
No: All 's himself—all service, therefore, rates
Alike, nor serving one part, immolates
The rest: but all in time! That lance of yours
Makes havoc soon with Malek and his Moors,
That buckler 's lined with many a Giant's beard
Ere long, Porphyrio, be the lance but reared,
The buckler wielded handsomely as now;
But view your escort, bear in mind your vow,
Count the pale tracts of sand to pass ere that,
And, if you hope we struggle through this flat,

Put lance and buckler up—next half-month lacks
A sturdy exercise of mace or axe
To cleave this dismal brake of prickly-pear
That bristling holds Cydippe by the hair,
Lames barefoot Agathon.
Oh, People, urge
Your claims!—for thus he ventured to the verge
Push a vain mummery which perchance distrust
Of his fast-slipping resolution thrust
No less: accordingly the Crowd—as yet
He had inconsciously contrived forget
To dwell upon the points . . . one might assuage
The signal horrors sooner than engage
With a dim vulgar vast unobvious grief
Not to be fancied off, obtain relief
In brilliant fits, cured by a happy quirk,
But by dim vulgar vast unobvious work
To correspond—however, forth they stood:
And now content thy stronger vision, brood
On thy bare want; the grave stript turf by turf,
Study the corpse-face thro' the taint-worms' scurf!
Down sank the People's Then; uprose their Now.
These sad ones render service to! And how
Piteously little must that service prove
—Had surely proved in any case! for move

Each other obstacle away, let youth
Have been aware it had surprised a Truth
'Twere service to impart—can Truth be seized,
Settled forthwith, and of the captive eased
Its captor look around, since this alit
So happily, no gesture luring it,
The earnest of a flock to follow? Vain,
Most vain! a life 's to spend ere this he chain,
To the poor crowd's complacence; ere the crowd
Pronounce it captured he descries a cloud
Its kin of twice the plumage—he, in turn,
If he shall live as many lives, may learn
Secure—not otherwise. Then Mantua called
Back to his mind how certain bards were thralled
—Buds blasted, but of breaths more like perfumes
Than Naddo's staring nosegay's carrion blooms
Could boast—some rose that burnt heart out in sweets,
A spendthrift in the Spring, no Summer greets—
Some Dularete, drunk with truths and wine,
Grown bestial dreaming how become divine.
Yet to surmount this obstacle, commence
With the commencement, merits crowning! Hence
Must Truth be casual Truth, elicited
In sparks so mean, at intervals dispread

So rarely, that 'tis like at no one time
Of the world's story has not Truth, the prime
Of Truth, the very Truth which loosed had hurled
Its course aright, been really in the world
Content the while with some mean spark by dint
Of some chance-blow, the solitary hint
Of buried fire, which, rip its breast, would stream
Sky-ward!
Sordello's miserable gleam
Was looked for at the moment: he would dash
This badge to earth and all it brought, abash
Taurello thus, perhaps persuade him wrest
The Kaiser from his purpose; would attest
His constancy in any case. Before
He dashes it, however, think once more!
For, was that little truly service? Ay—
I' the end, no doubt; but meantime? Plain you spy
Its ultimate Effect, but many flaws
Of vision blur each intervening Cause;
Were the day's fraction clear as the life's sum
Of service, Now as filled as the To-come
With evidence of good—nor too minute
A share to vie with evil! How dispute
The Guelfs were fitliest maintained in rule?
That made the life's work: not so easy school

Your day's work—say, on natures circumstanced
So variously, which yet, as each advanced
Or might impede that Guelf rule, it behoved
You, for the Then's sake, hate what Now you loved,
Love what you hated; nor if one man bore
Brand upon temples while his fellow wore
The aureole, would it task us to decide—
But portioned duly out, the Future vied
Never with the unparcelled Present! Smite
Or spare so much on warrant all so slight?
The Present's complete sympathies to break,
Aversions bear with, for a Future's sake
So feeble? Tito ruined through one speck,
The Legate saved by his sole lightish fleck?
This were work, true—but work performed at cost
Of other work—aught gained here, elsewhere lost—
For a new segment spoil an orb half-done—
Rise with the People one step, and sink . . . one?
Would it were one step—less than the whole face
Of things our novel duty bids erase!
Harms are to vanquish; what? the Prophet saith,
The Minstrel singeth vainly then? Old faith,
Old courage, born of the surrounding harms,
Were not, from highest to the lowest, charms?

Oh, flame persists but is not glare as stanch?
Where the salt marshes stagnate, crystals branch—
Blood dries to crimson—Evil 's beautified
In every shape! But Beauty thrust aside
You banish Evil: wherefore? After all
Is Evil our result less natural
Than Good? For overlook the Seasons' strife
With tree and flower—the hideous animal life,
Of which who seeks shall find a grinning taunt
For his solution, must endure the vaunt
Of Nature's angel, as a child that knows
Himself befooled, unable to propose
Aught better than the fooling—and but care
For Men, the varied People then and there,
Of which 'tis easy saying Good and Ill
Claim him alike! Whence rose the claim but still
From Ill, the fruit of Ill—what else could knit
Him theirs but Sorrow? Any free from it
Were also free from him! A happiness
Could be distinguished in this morning's press
Of miseries—the fool's who passed a gibe
On one, said he, so wedded to his tribe
He carries green and yellow tokens in
His very face that he 's a Ghibellin—

Much hold on him that fool obtained! Nay mount
Yet higher; and upon Men's own account
Must Evil stay: for what is Joy? To heave
Up one obstruction more, and common leave
What was peculiar—by this act destroy
Itself; a partial death is every joy;
The sensible escape, enfranchisement
Of a sphere's essence: once the vexed—content,
The cramped—at large, the growing circle—round,
All's to begin again—some novel bound
To break, some new enlargement 's to entreat,
The sphere though larger is not more complete.
Now for Mankind's experience: who alone
Might style the unobstructed world his own?
Whom palled Goito with its perfect things?
Sordello's self; whereas for Mankind springs
Salvation—hindrances are interposed
For them, not all Life's view at once disclosed
To creatures sudden on its summit left
With Heaven above and yet of wings bereft—
But lower laid, as at the mountain's foot
Where, range on range, the girdling forests shoot
Between the prospect and the throngs who scale
Earnestly ever, piercing veil by veil,

Confirmed with each discovery; in their soul
The Whole they seek by Parts—but, found that Whole,
Could they revert? Oh, testify! · The space
Of time we judge so meagre to embrace
The Parts, were more than plenty, once attained
The Whole, to quite exhaust it: for nought's gained
But leave to look—no leave to do: Beneath
Soon sates the looker—look Above, then! Death
Tempts ere a tithe of Life be tasted. Live
First, and die soon enough, Sordello! Give
Body and spirit the bare right they claim
To pasture thee on a voluptuous shame
That thou, a pageant-city's denizen,
Art neither vilely lodged midst Lombard men—
Canst force joy out of sorrow, seem to truck
Thine attributes away for sordid muck,
Yet manage from that very muck educe
Gold; then subject, nor scruple, to thy cruce
The world's discardings; think, if ingots pay
Such pains, the clods that yielded them are clay
To all save thee, and clay remain though quenched
Thy purging-fire; who's robbed then? Would I wrenched
An ample treasure forth!—As 'tis, why crave
A share that ruins me and will not save

Yourselves?—imperiously command I quit
The course that makes my joy nor will remit
Your woe? Would all arrive at joy? Reverse
The order (time instructs you) nor coerce
Each unit till, some predetermined mode,
The total be emancipate; our road
Is one, our times of travel many; thwart
No enterprising soul's precocious start
Before the general march; if slow or fast
All straggle up to the same point at last,
Why grudge my having gained a month ago
The brakes at balm-shed, asphodels in blow,
While you were landlocked? Speed your Then, but how
This badge would suffer me improve my Now!
  His time of action for, against, or with
Our world (I labour to extract the pith
Of this and more) grew up, that even-tide,
Gigantic with its power of joy beside
The world's eternity of impotence
To profit though at all his joy's expense.
Make nothing of that time because so brief?
Rather make more—instead of joy take grief
Before its novelty have time subside;
No time for the late savour—leave untried

Virtue, the creaming honey wine, quick squeeze
Vice like a biting spirit from the lees
Of life—together let wrath, hatred, lust,
All tyrannies in every shape be thrust
Upon this Now, which time may reason out
As mischiefs, far from benefits, no doubt—
But long ere then Sordello will have slipt
Away—you teach him at Goito's crypt
There's a blank issue to that fiery thrill!
Stirring, the Few cope with the Many, still:
So much of dust as, quiet, makes a mass
Unable to produce three tufts of grass,
Shall, troubled by the whirlwind, render void
The whole calm glebe's endeavour: be employed!
And e'en though somewhat smarts the Crowd for this,
Contributes each his pang to make up bliss,
'Tis but one pang—one blood-drop to the bowl
Which brimful tempts the sluggish asp uncowl
So quick, stains ruddily the dull red cape,
And, kindling orbs dull as the unripe grape
Before, avails forthwith to disentrance
The mischief—soon to lead a mystic dance
Among you! Nay, who sits alone in Rome?
Have those great hands indeed hewn out a home

For me—compelled to live? Oh Life, life-breath,
Life-blood,—ere sleep be travail, life ere death!
This life to feed my soul, direct, oblique,
But alway feeding! Hindrances? They pique—
Helps? such . . . but wherefore say my soul o'ertops
All height—than every depth profounder drops?
Enough that I can live, and would live! Wait
For some transcendent life reserved by Fate
To follow this? Oh, never! Fate I trust
The same my soul to; for, as who flings dust
Perchance—so facile was the deed, she chequed
The void with these materials to affect
That soul diversely—these consigned anew
To nought by death, why marvel if she threw
A second and superber spectacle
Before it? What may serve for sun—what still
Wander a moon above me—what else wind
About me like the pleasures left behind?
And how shall some new flesh that is not flesh
Cling to me? what's new laughter—soothes the fresh
Sleep like sleep? Fate 's exhaustless for my sake
In brave resource, but whether bids she slake
My thirst at this first rivulet or count
No draught worth lip save from the rocky fount

Above i' the clouds, while here she's provident
Of (taste) loquacious pearl the soft tree-tent
Guards, with its face of reate and sedge, nor fail
The silver globules and gold-sparkling grail
At bottom—Oh, 'twere too absurd to slight
For the hereafter the to-day's delight!
Quench thirst at this, then seek next well-spring—wear
Home-lilies ere strange lotus in my hair!
Here is the Crowd, whom I with freest heart
Offer to serve, contented for my part
To give this life up once for all, but grant
I really serve; if otherwise, why want
Aught further of me? Life they cannot chuse
But set aside—wherefore should I refuse
The gift? I take it—I, for one, engage
Never to falter through the pilgrimage—
Or end it howling that the stock or stone
Were enviable, truly: I, for one,
Will praise the world you style mere anteroom
To the true palace—but shall I assume
—My foot the courtly gait, my tongue the trope,
My eye the glance, before the doors fly ope
One moment? What—with guarders row on row,
Gay swarms of varletry that come and go,

Pages to dice with, waiting-girls unlace
The plackets of, pert claimants help displace,
Heart-heavy suitors get a rank for; laugh
At yon sleek parasite, break his own staff
'Cross Beetle-brows the Usher's shoulder; why—
Admitted to the presence by and bye,
Should thought of these recurring make me grieve
Among new sights I reach, old sights I leave?
—Cool citrine-crystals, fierce pyropus-stone—
Bare floor-work too!—But did I let alone
That black-eyed peasant in the vestibule
Once and for ever?—Floor-work? No such fool!
Rather, were Heaven to forestal Earth, I'd say
Must I be blessed or you? Then my own way
Bless me—a firmer arm, a fleeter foot,
I'll thank you, but to no mad wings transmute
These limbs of mine—our greensward is too soft;
Nor camp I on the thunder-cloud aloft—
We feel the bliss distinctlier having thus
Engines subservient, not mixed up with us—
Better move palpably through Heaven—nor, freed
Of flesh forsooth, from space to space proceed
'Mid flying synods of worlds—but in Heaven's marge
Show Titan still, recumbent o'er his targe

Solid with stars—the Centaur at his game
Made tremulously out in hoary flame!
  Life! Yet the very cup whose extreme dull
Dregs, even, I would quaff, was dashed, at full,
Aside so oft; the death I fly, revealed
So oft a better life this life concealed
And which sage, champion, martyr, thro' each path
Have hunted fearlessly—the horrid bath,
The crippling-irons and the fiery chair:
—'Twas well for them; let me become aware
As they, and I relinquish Life, too! Let
Life's secret but disclose itself! Forget
Vain ordinances, I have one appeal—
I feel, am what I feel, know what I feel
—So much is Truth to me—What Is then? Since
One object viewed diversely may evince
Beauty and ugliness—this way attract,
That way repel, why gloze upon the fact?
Why must a single of the sides be right?
Who bids choose this and leave its opposite?
No abstract Right for me—in youth endued
With Right still present, still to be pursued,
Thro' all the interchange of circles, rife
Each with its proper law and mode of life,

Each to be dwelt at ease in: thus to sway
Regally with the Kaiser, or obey
Implicit with his Serf of fluttering heart,
Or, like a sudden thought of God's, to start
Up in the presence, then go forth and shout
That some should pick the unstrung jewels out—
Were well!
And, as in moments when the Past
Gave partially enfranchisement, he cast
Himself quite thro' mere secondary states
Of his soul's essence, little loves and hates,
Into the mid vague yearnings overlaid
By these; as who should pierce hill, plain, grove, glade,
And so into the very nucleus probe
That first determined there exist a Globe:
And as that 's easiest half the globe dissolved,
So seemed Sordello's closing-truth evolved
In his flesh-half's break up—the sudden swell
Of his expanding soul showed Ill and Well,
Sorrow and Joy, Beauty and Ugliness
Virtue and Vice, the Larger and the Less,
All qualities, in fine, recorded here,
Might be but Modes of Time and this one Sphere,

Urgent on these but not of force to bind
As Time—Eternity, as Matter—Mind,
If Mind, Eternity shall choose assert
Their attributes within a Life: thus girt
With circumstance, next change beholds them cinct
Quite otherwise—with Good and Ill distinct,
Joys, sorrows, tending to a like result—
Contrived to render easy, difficult,
This or the other course of . . . what new bond
In place of flesh may stop their flight beyond
Its new sphere, as that course does harm or good
To its arrangements. Once this understood,
As suddenly he felt himself alone,
Quite out of Time and this World, all was known.
What made the secret of the past despair?
(Most imminent when he seemed most aware
Of greatness in the Past—nought turned him mad
Like craving to expand the power he had,
Not a new power to be expanded)—just
This made it; Soul on Matter being thrust,
'Tis Joy when so much Soul is wreaked in Time
On Matter,—let the Soul attempt sublime
Matter beyond its scheme and so prevent
Or more or less that deed's accomplishment,

And Sorrow follows: Sorrow to avoid—
Let the Employer match the thing Employed,
Fit to the finite his infinity,
And thus proceed for ever, in degree
Changed but in kind the same, still limited
To the appointed circumstance and dead
To all beyond: a sphere is but a sphere—
Small, Great, are merely terms we bandy here—
Since to the spirit's absoluteness all
Are like: now of the present sphere we call
Life, are conditions—take but this among
Many; the Body was to be so long
Youthful, no longer—but, since no control
Tied to that Body's purposes his Soul,
It chose to understand the Body's trade
More than the Body's self—had fain conveyed
Its boundless, to the body's bounded lot—
So, the soul permanent, the body not,—
Scarce the one minute for enjoying here,
The soul must needs instruct its weak compeer,
Run o'er its capabilities and wring
A joy thence it holds worth experiencing—
Which, far from half discovered even,—lo,
The minute's gone, the body's power's let go

Apportioned to that joy's acquirement! Broke,
Say, morning o'er the earth and all it woke—
From the volcano's vapour-flag to hoist
Black o'er the spread of sea, to the low moist
Dale's silken barley-spikes sullied with rain,
Swayed earthwards, heavily to raise again—
(The Small a sphere as perfect as the Great
To the soul's absoluteness)—meditate
On such an Autumn-morning's cluster-chord
And the whole music it was framed afford,
And, the chord's might discovered, what should pluck
One string, the finger, was found palsy-struck.
And then what marvel if the Spirit, shown
A saddest sight—the Body lost alone
Thro' its officious proffered help, deprived
Of this and that enjoyment Fate contrived,
Virtue, Good, Beauty, each allowed slip hence,—
Vain gloriously were fain, for recompense,
To stem the ruin even yet, protract
The Body's term, supply the power it lacked
From its infinity, compel it learn
These qualities were only Time's concern,
That Body may, with its assistance, barred—
Advance the same, vanquished—obtain reward,

Reap joy where sorrow was intended grow,
Of Wrong make Right and turn Ill Good below—
And the result is, the poor Body soon
Sinks under what was meant a wondrous boon,
Leaving its bright accomplice all aghast.
So much was plain then, proper in the Past;
To be complete for, satisfy the whole
Series of spheres—Eternity, his soul
Exceeded, so was incomplete for, each
One sphere—our Time. But does our knowledge reach
No farther? Is the cloud of hindrance broke
But by the failing of the fleshly yoke,
Its loves and hates, as now when they let soar
The spirit, self-sufficient as before,
Tho' but the single space that shall elapse
'Twixt its enthralment in new bonds perhaps?
Must Life be ever but escaped, which should
Have been enjoyed? nay, might have been and would,
Once ordered rightly, and a Soul's no whit
More than the Body's purpose under it
(A breadth of watery heaven like a bay,
A sky-like space of water, ray for ray
And star for star, one richness where they mixed
As this and that wing of an angel, fixed,

Tumultuary splendours folded in
To die) and which thus, far from first begin
Exciting discontent, had surest quelled
The Body if aspiring it rebelled.
But how so order Life? Still brutalize
The soul, the sad world's method—muffled eyes
To all that was before, shall after be
This sphere—and every other quality
Save some sole and immutable Great and Good
And Beauteous whither fate has loosed its hood
To follow? Never may some soul see All
—The Great before and after and the Small
Now, yet be saved by this the simplest lore,
And take the single course prescribed before,
As the king-bird with ages on his plumes
Travels to die in his ancestral glooms?
But where descry the Love that shall select
That course? Here is a Soul whom to affect
Nature has plied with all her means—from trees
And flowers—e'en to the Multitude . . . and these
Decides he save or no? One word to end!
Ah my Sordello, I this once befriend
And speak for you. A Power above him still
Which, utterly incomprehensible,

Is out of rivalry, which thus he can
Love, tho' unloving all conceived by Man—
What need! And of—none the minutest duct
To that out-Nature, nought that would instruct
And so let rivalry begin to live—
But of a Power its representative
Who, being for authority the same,
Communication different, should claim
A course the first chose and this last revealed—
This Human clear, as that Divine concealed—
The utter need!
What has Sordello found?
Or can his spirit go the mighty round
At length, end where our souls begun? as says
Old fable, the two doves were sent two ways
About the world—where in the midst they met
Tho' on a shifting waste of sand, men set
Jove's temple? Quick, what has Sordello found?
For they approach—approach—that foot's rebound..
Palma? No, Salinguerra tho' in mail;
They mount, have reached the threshold, dash the veil
Aside—and you divine who sat there dead
Under his foot the badge; still, Palma said,
A triumph lingering in the wide eyes
Wider than some spent swimmer's if he spies

Help from above in his extreme despair
And, head far back on shoulder thrust, turns there
With short and passionate cry; as Palma prest
In one great kiss her lips upon his breast
It beat. By this the hermit-bee has stopped
His day's toil at Goito—the new cropped
Dead vine-leaf answers, now 'tis eve, he bit,
Twirled so, and filed all day—the mansion's fit
God counselled for; as easy guess the word
That passed betwixt them and become the third
To the soft small unfrighted bee, as tax
Him with one fault—so no remembrance racks
Of the stone maidens and the font of stone
He, creeping thro' the crevice, leaves alone—
Alas, my friend—Alas Sordello! whom
Anon we laid within that cold font-tomb—
And yet again alas!

And now is 't worth
Our while bring back to mind, much less set forth
How Salinguerra extricates himself
Without Sordello? Ghibellin and Guelf
May fight their heroes! If Count Richard sulked
In durance or the Marquis paid his mulct,
Who cares, Sordello 's gone! The upshot, sure,
Was peace; our chief made some frank overture

That prospered; compliment fell thick and fast
On its disposer, and Taurello passed
With foe and friend for an outstripping soul
Nine days at least: then, fairly reached the goal,
He, by one effort, blotted the great hope
Out of his mind, no further tried to cope
With Este that mad evening's style, but sent
Away the Legate and the League, content
No blame at least the brothers had incurred,
—Despatched a message to the Monk he heard
Patiently first to last, scarce shivered at,
Then curled his limbs up on his wolfskin mat
And ne'er spoke more,—informed the Ferrarese
He but retained their rule so long as these
Lingered in pupilage—and last, no mode
Apparent else of keeping safe the road
From Germany direct to Lombardy
For Friedrich, none, that is, to guarantee
The faith and promptitude of who should next
Obtain Sofia's dowry, sore perplexed—
(Sofia being youngest of the tribe
Of daughters Ecelin was wont to bribe
The envious magnates with—nor since he sent
Enrico Egna this fair child had Trent

Once failed the Kaiser's purposes—we lost
Egna last year, and who takes Egna's post—
Opens the Lombard gate if Friedrich knock?)
Himself espoused the Lady of the Rock
In pure necessity, and so destroyed
His slender last of chances, quite made void
Old prophecy, and spite of all the schemes
Overt and covert, youth's deeds, age's dreams,
Was sucked into Romano: and so hushed
He up this evening's work, that when, 'twas brushed
Somehow against by a blind chronicle
Which, chronicling whatever woe befell
Ferrara, scented this the obscure woe
And "Salinguerra's sole son Giacomo
Deceased, fatuous and doting, ere his Sire,"
The townsfolk rubbed their eyes, could but admire
Which of Sofia's five he meant. The chaps
Of his dead hope were tardy to collapse,
Obliterated not the beautiful
Distinctive features at a crash—scarce dull
Next year, as Azzo, Boniface withdrew
Each to his stronghold; then (securely too
Ecelin at Campese slept—close by
Who likes may see him in Solagna lie

With cushioned head and gloved hand to denote
The Cavalier he was)—then his heart smote
Young Ecelin, conceive! Long since adult,
And, save Vicenza's business, what result
In blood and blaze? so hard 'twas intercept
Sordello till Sordello's option! Stept
Its lord on Lombardy—for in the nick
Of time when he at last and Alberic
Closed with Taurello, came precisely news
That in Verona half the souls refuse
Allegiance to the Marquis and the Count—
Have cast them from a throne they bid him mount,
Their Podestà, thro' his ancestral worth:
Ecelin flew there, and the town henceforth
Was wholly his—Taurello sinking back
From temporary station to a track
That suited: news received of this acquist,
Friedrich did come to Lombardy—who missed
Taurello? Yet another year—they took
Vicenza, left the Marquis scarce a nook
For refuge, and, when hundreds two or three
After conspired to call themselves "the Free,"
Opposing Alberic, these Bassanese,
(Without Sordello!)—Ecelin at ease

Slaughtered them so observably that oft
A little Salinguerra looked with soft
Blue eyes up, asked his sire the proper age
To get appointed his proud uncle's page:
More years passed, and that sire was dwindled down
To a mere showy turbulent soldier, grown
Better through age, his parts still in repute,
Subtle—how else?—but hardly so astute
As his contemporaneous friends professed—
Undoubtedly a brawler—for the rest,
Known by each neighbour, so allowed for, let
Keep his incorrigible ways, nor fret
Men who had missed their boyhood's bugbear—trap
The ostrich, suffer our bald osprey flap
A battered pinion—was the word. In fine,
One flap too much and Venice's marine
Was meddled with; no overlooking that!
We captured him in his Ferrara, fat
And florid at a banquet, more by fraud
Than force, to speak the truth—there 's slender laud
Ascribed you for assisting eighty years
To pull his death on such a man—fate shears
The life-cord prompt enough whose last fine threads
You fritter: so, presiding his board-head,

A great smile your assurance all went well
With Friedrich (as if he were like to tell!)
In rushed (a plan contrived before) our friends,
Made some pretence at fighting, just amends
For the shame done his eighty years—apart
The principle, none found it in his heart
To be much angry with Taurello—gained
Our galleys with the prize, and what remained
But carry him to Venice for a show?
—Set him, as 'twere, down gently—free to go
His gait, inspect our square, pretend observe
The swallows soaring their eternal curve
'Twixt Theodore and Mark, if citizens
Gathered importunately, fives and tens,
To point their children the Magnifico,
All but a monarch once in firm-land, go
His gait among us now—it took, indeed,
Fully this Ecelin to supersede
That man, remarked the seniors. Singular
Sordello's inability to bar
Rivals the stage, that evening, mainly brought
About by his strange disbelief that aught
Was to be done, should fairly thrust the Twain
Under Taurello's tutelage, that, brain

And heart and hand, he forthwith in one rod
Indissolubly bound to baffle God
Who loves the world—should thus allow the thin
Grey wizened dwarfish devil Ecelin,
And massy-muscled big-boned Alberic
(Mere man, alas) to put his problem quick
To demonstration—prove wherever's will
To do, there's plenty to be done, or ill
Or good: anointed, then, to rend and rip—
Kings of the gag and flesh-hook, screw and whip,
They plagued the world: a touch of Hildebrand
(So far from obsolete!) made Lombards band
Together, cross their coats as for Christ's cause,
And saving Milan win the world's applause.
Ecelin perished: and I think grass grew
Never so pleasant as in Valley Rù
By San Zenon where Alberic in turn
Saw his exasperated captors burn
Seven children with their mother, and, regaled
So far, tied on to a wild horse, was trailed
To death through raunce and bramble-bush: I take
God's part and testify that mid the brake
Wild o'er his castle on Zenone's knoll
You hear its one tower left, a belfry, toll—

Cherups the contumacious grasshopper,
Rustles the lizard and the cushats chirre
Above the ravage: there, at deep of day
A week since, heard I the old Canon say
He saw with his own eyes a barrow burst
And Alberic's huge skeleton unhearsed
Five years ago, no more: he added, June's
A month for carding off our first cocoons
The silkworms fabricate—a double news,
Nor he nor I could tell the worthier. Choose!
And Naddo gone, all's gone; not Eglamor!
Believe I knew the face I waited for,
A guest my spirit of the golden courts:
Oh strange to see how, despite ill-reports,
Disuse, some wear of years, that face retained
Its joyous look of love! Suns waxed and waned,
And still my spirit held an upward flight,
Spiral on spiral, gyres of life and light
More and more gorgeous—ever that face there
The last admitted! crossed, too, with some care
As perfect triumph were not sure for all,
But on a few enduring damp must fall,
A transient struggle, haply a painful sense
Of the inferior nature's clinging—whence

Slight starting tears easily wiped away,
Fine jealousies soon stifled in the play
Of irrepressible admiration—not
Aspiring, all considered, to their lot
Who ever, just as they prepare ascend
Spiral on spiral, wish thee well, impend
Thy frank delight at their exclusive track,
That upturned fervid face and hair put back!
Is there no more to say? He of the rhymes—
Many a tale of this retreat betimes
Was born: Sordello die at once for men?
The Chroniclers of Mantua tired their pen
Relating how a Prince Visconti saved
Mantua and elsewhere notably behaved—
Who thus by fortune's ordering events
Passed with posterity to all intents
For just the God he never could become:
As Knight, Bard, Gallant, men were never dumb
In praise of him: while what he should have been,
Could be, and was not—the one step too mean
For him to take, we suffer at this day
Because of; Ecelin had pushed away
Its chance ere Dante could arrive to take
That step Sordello spurned, for the world's sake:

He did much—but Sordello's step was gone.
Thus had Sordello ta'en that step alone,
Apollo had been compassed—'twas a fit
He wished should go to him, not he to it
—As one content to merely be supposed
Singing or fighting elsewhere, while he dozed
Really at home—and who was chiefly glad
To have achieved the few real deeds he had
Because that way assured they were not worth
Doing, so spared from doing them henceforth—
A tree that covets fruitage and yet tastes
Never itself, itself—had he embraced
Our cause then, Men had plucked Hesperian fruit
And, praising that, just thrown him in to boot
All he was anxious to appear but scarce
Solicitous to be: a sorry farce
Such life is after all—cannot I say
He lived for some one better thing? this way—
Lo, on a heathy brown and nameless hill
By sparkling Asolo, in mist and chill,
Morning just up, higher and higher runs
A child barefoot and rosy—See! the sun's
On the square castle's inner-court's green wall
—Like the chine of some fossil animal

Half turned to earth and flowers; and thro' the haze
(Save where some slender patches of grey maize)
Are to be overleaped) that boy has crost
The whole hill-side of dew and powder-frost
Matting the balm and mountain camomile:
Up and up goes he, singing all the while
Some unintelligible words to beat
The lark, God's poet, swooning at his feet
So worsted is he at the few fine locks
Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks
Sunblanched the livelong summer.—All that's left
Of the Goito lay! And thus bereft,
Sleep and forget, Sordello . . . in effect
He sleeps, the feverish poet—I suspect
Not utterly companionless; but, friends,
Wake up; the ghost's gone, and the story ends
I'd fain hope, sweetly—seeing, peri or ghoul,
That spirits are conjectured fair or foul,
Evil or good, judicious authors think,
According as they vanish in a stink
Or in a perfume: friends be frank: ye snuff
Civet, I warrant: really? Like enough—
Merely the savour's rareness—any nose
May ravage with impunity a rose—

Rifle a musk-pod and 'twill ache like yours:
I'd tell you that same pungency ensures
An after-gust—but that were overbold:
Who would has heard Sordello's story told.

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